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THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.

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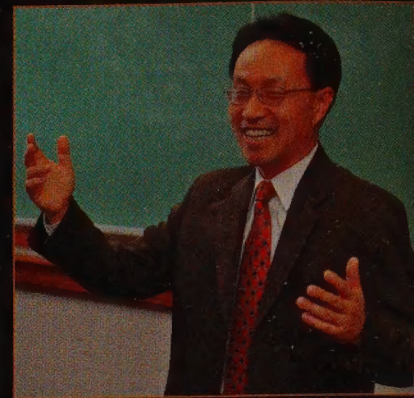
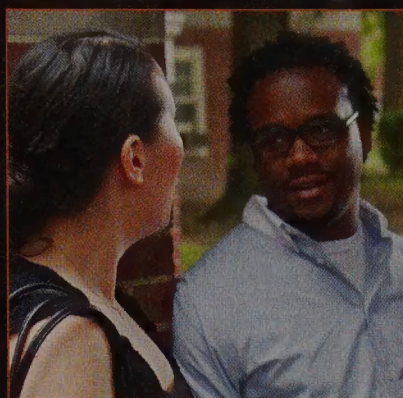
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Life drawing

IN THIS ISSUE, several theological educators, authors and leaders recall experiences that were key in the formation of their faith. For example, Michael Jenkins, a seminary president, recalls a conversation he had with his mother about a verse of scripture and a sermon based on it. Both were “indecipherable for a small child,” says Jenkins. But it wasn’t the content of verse and sermon that mattered most in the end. What stayed with him was the way his mother responded and her ability to bridge the mundane and the theological.

It is helpful to identify the formative moments in one’s life. At a time in my life when I was having misgivings about my vocation, I attended a seminar led by Reuel Howe, a scholarly Episcopal priest who wrote books about and led workshops in what we were learning to call spirituality. Howe taught at Episcopal seminaries and had developed a program in clinical pastoral training.

The seminar turned out to be a crash course in clinical pastoral education. I had never been a part of anything like it. I’m almost ashamed to admit that until that point I had never hugged a man other than my father, and him only rarely. Yet

before the workshop was over, all 20 of us participants were hugging each other with abandon.

The exercise I remember most clearly was about identifying and giving thanks for formative moments. Howe passed out large sheets of newsprint and crayons and asked us to draw the floor plan of the first house we could remember and its furnishings. I am usually uncomfortable with exercises that seem manipulative, but I found myself engaged in this one.

I sketched my family’s living room, with the worn couch and chairs and large Philco radio; the kitchen, with the sink where I dried dishes standing beside my mother; the dining room, which was used only for holiday dinners and festive occasions and which held the music stand where I practiced playing my trumpet. After half an hour or so, Howe instructed us to go back through our drawings and identify places where we first were aware of God and the people in those places who taught us to believe.

When it came time to share, there were plenty of tears, some long-repressed anger and other powerful emotions. I’m grateful for that seminar and for the opportunity to identify some of my own formative moments.

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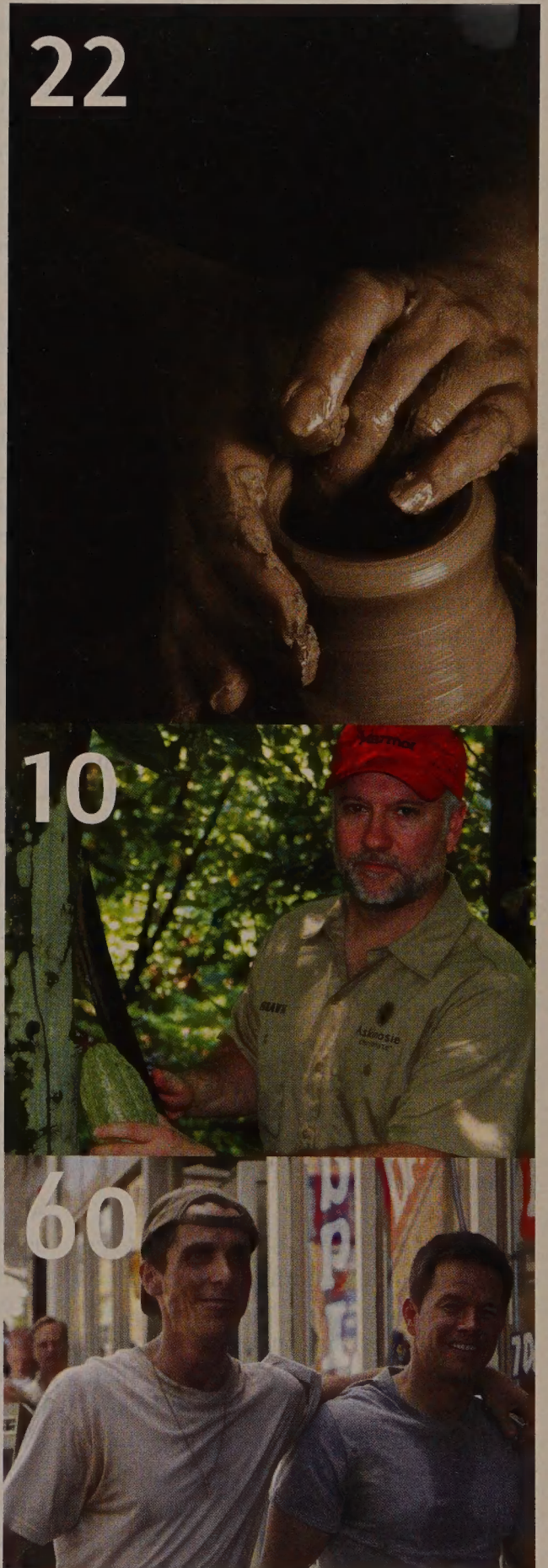
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Living syncretistically?

Amy Frykholm's interesting look at three different people's personal testimonies of "double belonging" (Jan. 25) in religious faith should have been—to use the words of the slogan on your masthead—more critical and more faithful. We were left with the assertion that double belonging is "hard to imagine and also true" and hence an acceptable norm of religious identity.

For nearly 40 years I have been required to explain both from the pulpit and in the classroom that there are no Jews for Jesus; rather, there are Christians who though raised as Jews have chosen to accept Christ as their personal savior and therefore are now Christians. If a person accepts Christ as their savior, then that personal choice obviates also living as an observant Jew. Just because the Jews for Jesus, Messianic Jews and some interfaith families say that both faiths coexist in their lives without comprising core values does not mean that the CHRISTIAN CENTURY should promote their personal stories as the norm.

If you want to move from "Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully" to "Thinking Individually, Living Syncretistically," please tell your readership so we can make appropriate choices.

*Rabbi Joseph A. Edelheit
St. Cloud, Minn.*

Promoting happiness . . .

In reviewing Derek Bok's *The Politics of Happiness*, Timothy Renick ("Pursuing happiness," Jan. 11) reports some of the activities that, in Bok's research, seem to promote happiness and that, according to Bok, are in line with "mainstream" American values. Perhaps they are, but this seems to miss the point that lasting marriages, contribution to charities, community service and close friendships all suggest generous relationships (see, for example, Luke 6:38). It is heart-

ening to find participation in organized religion included in such a laudable list on strictly empirical grounds.

*George F. Dole
Bath, Me.*

Sacred study . . .

Barbara Brown's "The Muslim Jesus" (Jan. 11) is timely and helpful. I am part of a study group of about 30 adults reading through the Qur'an and meeting weekly for reflection. The conversations have been insightful and eye-opening. Over the course of our discussions we have come to affirm that "ignorance is bliss" is a myth. Ignorance is often the cause of harmful discord and conflict. We are learning a great deal about the sacred text of our Muslim neighbors, and whether or not we agree with any of it is not the point. The value of our study is that through this process we are coming to understand, as Taylor says, "more about [our] neighbors than either [our] uninformed hopes or fears can provide."

*Tim Hoyt Duncan
Northport, N.Y.*

Lies and ignorance . . .

As a subscriber to the CHRISTIAN CENTURY and a donor to the Southern Poverty Law Center I want to thank you for the editorial "Spreading lies" (Jan. 11). A democracy such as the U.S. is dependent upon an educated electorate, just as our courts are dependent upon educated juries.

When opinions expressed through the media are not based upon factual information, it is very easy to spread lies. When I believe a lie I am no longer educated. I become prejudicial, fearful and hateful. I then take all of my prejudices into the voting booth. Lies have led America down many prejudicial and hateful roads. Consider the lies of our innocence: that we lived in a land where

anyone by hard work could make it, that we had a manifest destiny, that a black person was three-fifths of a human and that homosexuals should be targeted with words that hurt or, worse yet, with physical violence.

*Jim Carstensen
Raymond, Miss.*

Your editorial said that the Southern Poverty Law Center defines as hate groups those with "beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics." But by the SPLC's definition, doesn't that make all religious faiths hate groups, if not for their practices at least for their beliefs? If I say, for example, that "no one comes to the Father but by the Son," am I not attacking—based on their "immutable characteristics"—all who don't hold that belief? Doesn't the SPLC fall under the category of a hate group, because it is attacking the "immutable characteristics" of those who believe, for instance, that the purpose of marriage is procreation? The saying is still true that in order to point a finger at others you have to be pointing three back at yourself.

*Al Milligan
Minburn, Iowa*

The editors reply:

Being gay, like being black or being a woman, is immutable. Holding certain beliefs—whether about Christianity, sexuality or anything else—is not. Seeking to identify and reduce hate speech and hate crimes does not in any way preclude a robust discussion of religious claims or of homosexuality. It does preclude making demonizing generalizations about a category of people—and it precludes using misinformation to spread such views. As our editorial and the SPLC statement made clear, the focus of the complaint is not the convictions that people hold. It's the fact that some of them malign and spread falsehoods about a whole group of people—in this case, gays and lesbians.

February 22, 2011

Going deeper

When theologian Stanley Hauerwas sought to join a Methodist church in Indiana some years ago, the pastor asked him about his prior church commitments. Hauerwas admitted that he wasn't sure where or when he had last been a formal member of a congregation. The pastor replied that this showed what "a sorry churchman" Hauerwas must be. "He then told me that, before he would let me join the church, I would need to come to a class he was beginning for people like me. I dutifully and gladly did for a year." (Hauerwas recounts this story in his memoir *Hannah's Child*.)

It's rare for a pastor or church to lay down that kind of requirement for a prospective member, much less for a professional theologian. Most pastors are happy if they can get people to attend a handful of sessions or a one-day retreat on the church's beliefs and practices.

In this issue, Frank G. Honeycutt describes an adult catechism program that Hauerwas's pastor—and Hauerwas himself—might endorse (p. 34). The class meets weekly for eight months, beginning before Advent and ending at Pentecost. Honeycutt acknowledges that only a small number of people are willing to commit to a sustained group program of biblical study, spiritual reflection, vocational discernment and mutual support, following the themes of the church year. But there can be little doubt that the experience is life-changing for those who do. And as Honeycutt suggests, the very existence of the program is likely to renew the congregation.

However practical Honeycutt's program may be for individual churches, he puts the issue of catechesis—intentional formation in faith—front and center, where it needs to be. A wakeup call to the church on this front was issued last year by Kenda Creasy Dean in her book *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. The focus of her book is the startling inability of churchgoing teens to articulate the meaning of Christian faith. Dean's complaint is not with teenagers, however; it is with the adults in the church who are themselves unable to talk about the difference that faith makes in their lives and who are therefore unable to share their faith with youth in a way that makes a difference in teens' lives.

Dean describes the difficulty she had lining up adult mentors for her confirmation students. She wanted the adults to converse with the students about Christ and help them grasp the basics of the faith. She got no takers. "People who selflessly supported youth ministry with money, phone calls, baked goods, and prayer chains came unglued at the thought of mentoring a teenager." These adults were willing to coach soccer or lead Girl Scouts, but what they "seemed to be afraid of was *faith*. They lacked confidence in their own faith formation."

Dean's message, like Honeycutt's, is simple: formation in faith does not happen by accident. It happens when churches puts commitment and creativity into the process and believe that the Holy Spirit is sure to show up.

Faith formation does not happen by accident.

CENTURY marks

SHARED BURDEN: During a particularly bleak time in apartheid South Africa, theologian Peter Storey visited an Anglican convent outside Pretoria and discovered that the sisters maintained a 24-hour prayer vigil on a rotating basis. One sister explained, “You church leaders have a big job to do, and you’re always so busy that we wonder whether you spend the time you should in prayer. We try to carry some of that load for you.” Although she had never met Storey, she said she knew him quite well. “Your name comes up every day between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m.” (*Weavings*, 26:2).

SELECTIVE GUEST LIST? Divine hospitality is one image of salvation in scrip-

ture, but some texts suggest that God is selective in showing hospitality. Theologian Amy Plantinga Pauw argues that these passages “function less as a reliable guide to future eschatological events than as a warning or encouragement to a particular community in its practices of hospitality.” We must say no to evil people, but we should “be very wary of claiming God’s blessing on it.” Saying no to evil people and those who would do us harm should always be “provisional, always ready to be overturned by the surprising graciousness of God” (*Word & World*, Winter).

COURSE CORRECTION: Until she had children of her own, English professor Paula Marantz Cohen prepared rig-

orous syllabi for her courses and modeled them after courses she had taken. Her children taught her to consider how students would respond to what she was requiring. Would it intrigue, amuse, annoy, anger or bore them? She would have been happy with any of these responses—except the last (*American Scholar*, Winter).

ISLAM AND REVOLUTION: It’s too soon to know what will result from the uprising in Egypt, but Haroon Moghul, a former official of the Islamic Center at New York University, does not think it will be a radical Islamic regime such as emerged in Iran in 1978–79. The Iranian revolution was fueled by grievances against an autocrat who tried to establish a Western-oriented secular society, and it was conducted by people with an authoritarian interpretation of Islam. Though some observers fear that the Muslim Brotherhood will emerge as the chief political power in Egypt, Moghul argues that it doesn’t have a specifically political agenda. “Egypt’s revolution doesn’t have to be Islamic because Islam isn’t at the heart of the problem on the ground,” said Moghul. Egyptian society and culture are already thoroughly Islamic. The protest is aimed at a brutal dictatorship and economic deprivation (*ReligionDispatches.org*, January 28).

MESSAGE FINDS MEDIA: In response to protests in the streets of Cairo, the Egyptian government shut down social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, the Internet itself, some cell phone service and Al Jazeera television. Protest organizers had to resort to old technology—distributing pamphlets, hanging banners and posters, even using ham radio. The Muslim Brotherhood has



its own means of getting out the word—mosques (*Guardian*, January 27, and *FastCompany.com*).

FORECLOSURES: Nearly 200 religious buildings have been foreclosed since 2008, compared to eight in the previous two years and close to none in the previous decade. Most of the financing problems have occurred with independent congregations. Many of the troubled church facilities are in California, Florida, Georgia and Michigan, states with high rates of foreclosures. Banks generally have been reluctant to foreclose on houses of worship, which are traditionally viewed as good risks because of the weekly cash flow from contributions and the moral compulsion many churches feel to pay their debts (*Wall Street Journal*, January 25).

ALTAR CALL? Newly installed Robert Bentley said he plans to be the governor of all Alabamians. But after taking the oath of office, in a short speech at Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, Bentley gave what sounded like an altar call: “So anybody here today who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior, I’m telling you, you’re not my brother and you’re not my sister, and I want to be your brother.” Asked later if he meant to insult people of other faiths, Bentley replied, “We’re not trying to insult anybody” (RNS via the *Birmingham News*).

TRUTH TELLING: Emory University has issued a statement acknowledging its involvement in slavery. In the pre-Civil War era, every president of the Atlanta university and most faculty members were slave owners. The school used slave labor in constructing buildings. The university also mounted theological arguments against abolition and played a major role in the schism of the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issue of slavery. In 1902 it ousted a professor for publishing an article on the horrors of lynching (*InsideHigherEd.com*, January 25).

WHAT THEY FOUGHT FOR: Americans are still arguing over the reasons for the Civil War, notes historian James W. Loewen, with some saying that

the South seceded to defend states’ rights, not slavery. But Loewen says the Southern states made it clear at the time that their secession was an effort to maintain the institution of slavery. The argument that Southern states would not have seceded over slavery since most white

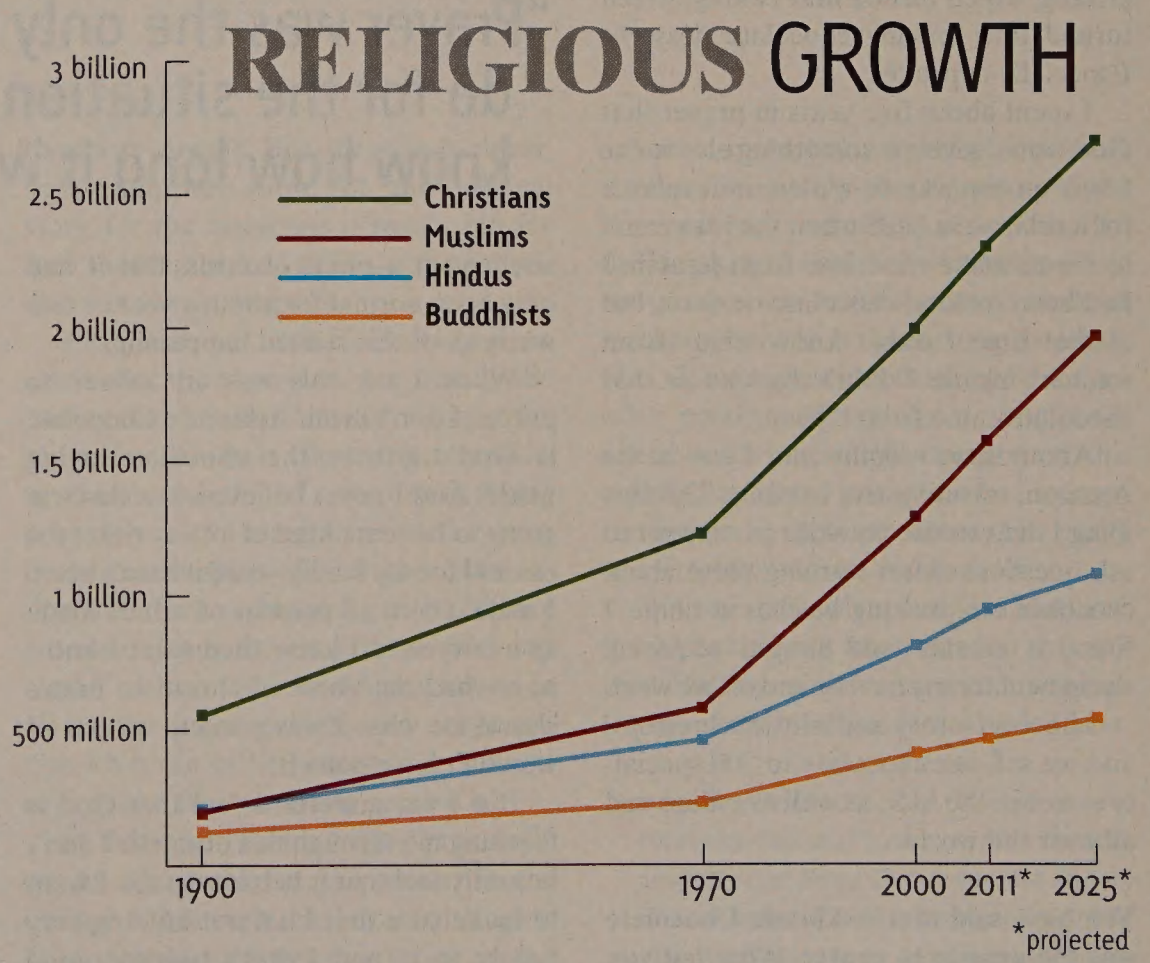
Southerners didn’t own slaves doesn’t work, he says—subsistence farmers hoped to become plantation owners someday and own their own slaves. Furthermore, Southerners couldn’t imagine a society with freed slaves being a peaceful society (*Washington Post*, January 9).

“Sometimes, common sense is ample guidance in foreign policy: the United States must invest in populations, not in dictators.”

— Steve Coll, on the popular uprising in Tunisia, which led to the downfall of its autocratic president who ruled the country for over two decades [*New Yorker*, January 31].

“While some are busy arguing that foreigners are taking high-tech jobs from Americans . . . researchers . . . found last year that the large presence of immigrants in high-tech fields stimulated business and actually created more jobs than they took away.”

— Edward Schumacher-Matos, who points out that the U.S. issues far more patents than other countries, and about a fourth of them in recent years have been granted to immigrants [*Washington Post*, January 28]



SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH (JANUARY)

A socially conscious entrepreneur

On a chocolate mission

SHAWN ASKINOSIE is the founder and owner of Askinosie Chocolate, a socially and environmentally conscious business in Springfield, Missouri. Askinosie works closely with farmers in four global regions. While producing award-winning chocolate, he seeks to create a business in which everyone involved—from farmer to factory worker to buyer—thrives.

How did you get into the chocolate business?

I was a criminal defense lawyer for 20 years and was ready for a career change. I thought about the food business because I had taken up the hobby of grilling, which turned into baking, which turned into making chocolate desserts. Especially cupcakes.

I spent about five years in prayer that God would give me something else to do. I was on my way to a memorial service for a relative in 2005 when the idea came to me to make chocolate from scratch. I had been making chocolate desserts, but at that time I didn't know what "from scratch" meant. I didn't even know that chocolate came from a bean.

About three months later I was in the Amazon, traveling and learning. The first thing I did was use my skills as a lawyer to ask questions. After learning more about chocolate and making batches at home, I found a partner and started acquiring equipment for my factory, and off we went.

I have a factory and a little storefront, and we sell our chocolate to 200 specialty stores in the U.S., as well as online and all over the world.

You have said that Askinosie Chocolate was the answer to prayer. What led you to prayer in the first place?

Prayer was the only thing I knew to do for the situation I was in. I didn't know at the time how long it would take.

I was raised in the Episcopal Church. My father died of cancer when I was 14. For many reasons, I turned away from the church. I still attended, but for about 25 years I felt like I was not really there.

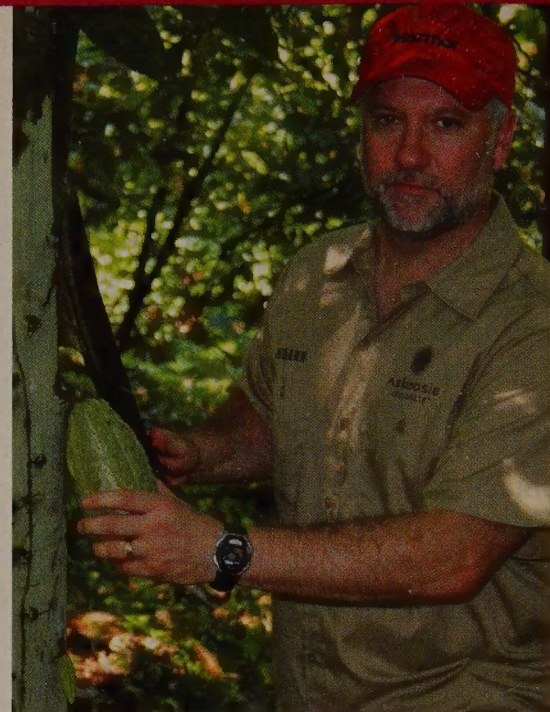
When I became reenlightened, I began to establish a true, honest relationship with God in a way that made me dependent on him. I started learning more about contemplative prayer and spending time at a nearby abbey, part of a Cistercian order. So prayer had become the natural thing for me to do,

"Prayer was the only thing I knew to do for the situation I was in. I didn't know how long it would take."

not just at a point of crisis. But it had only been normal for about a year or two when all of this started happening.

When I say this was an answer to prayer, I don't mean Askinosie Chocolate is God's gift to the chocolate-loving world. And I never believed that this was going to be some kind of lottery ticket for me and for my family—and it hasn't been. I make about 15 percent of what I made as a lawyer. If I knew then what I know now—had the ghost of chocolate future shown me what it was going to be like—I wouldn't have done it.

But I am grateful. I feel that God is teaching me through this business. I don't honestly feel that it belongs to me. I want to make sure that I am not holding very tightly to it, and I don't practice good works in order to make myself look good.



What did you learn when you went to the Amazon?

The first thing that struck me about the Amazon was that I had never really had an overwhelming creation experience before. I had never experienced awe in nature. We flew in on a plane and then went on a two-week walk into the forest. For the first time that I can remember, I felt really inferior to my environment. For a trial lawyer, that was

pretty incredible. That experience contributed to our company's environmental awareness and our request that our farmers grow the beans in an environmentally sensitive way.

You also want your business to support social justice. How did that come about?

I have been passionate about social justice my whole life. I lived in Thailand at 19, working with the International Rescue Committee. In my law business I practiced open book management, and we shared what we had with everyone. We do the same thing now with our farmers.

The genesis of how we treat farmers was in prayer, not travel. Frankly, it is a gospel-driven component of our company. It's the same with how we relate to

the surrounding area. We try to think about what we can do for the whole neighborhood.

For example, we run a “chocolate university” in which we work with children from grade school through high school, teaching them about what we do. I had a weekly program for high school students that we called a “bean to bar” program. The students’ project was to help me pick a country in Africa that could be our fourth source for beans. They chose Tanzania, and we all went there together. My one requirement was that they find a woman-led farmer group. We shipped home seven metric tons of beans. This was the first time that any

chocolate farmer in the world sold directly to a chocolate maker. We did that because we want to empower women entrepreneurs.

What are your sources of inspiration?

I am part of a Bible study group that has been meeting every Tuesday for 11 years. I turn to the people in that group more than anywhere else. We meet on Tuesdays because of Mitch Albom’s *Tuesdays with Morrie*. That was the book that really broke everything down for me. I know Morrie was a religious mutt, as he calls himself, but God spoke to me through that book. God can speak through anything.

I also turn to the Sacred Space website—a contemplative prayer site run by Irish Jesuits. I also have a new app for my iPhone of Mother Teresa quotes. *Come Be My Light* is amazing. Unbelievable. To me it was a book about being real and being hopeful. Here’s a woman who persevered through doubt. It makes me want to sell everything and go live in India.

Another book that is very meaningful to me is *The Joy of Full Surrender*, by Jean Pierre de Caussade, a 17th-century monk. If I had to choose one book to take with me to a desert island besides the Bible, that would be it.

—Amy Frykholm

A congregation confronts a parable

Seeds and sowers

by Timothy Beal

THE BIBLE HAS the power to generate new meaning in new contexts and thereby to affirm both unity and diversity in communities whose members engage one another around the text. To show students this way of engaging biblical literature, I often show them clips from a television series hosted in the 1990s by Bill Moyers, “Genesis: A Living Conversation.” Each of its one-hour sessions brought a handful of people together to focus on a single short story from Genesis. They sat in a circle and talked about the story, keeping their comments and questions grounded in the details of the text.

One gets the feeling from the conversation that there are just as many versions of the story as there are people in the room. Nevertheless, the different voices stay connected through respectful, even if contentious, conversation. At the end there is no final word on what

the story means. But there is a richer, deeper appreciation for the biblical story, for the questions it raises and for how those questions relate to the experiences of the participants.

Last year our church developed an adult education program inspired by the “living conversation” model. Around the same time, my wife, Clover, and her pastoral colleague, John Lentz, began asking how they might bring some of the same participatory spirit of biblical interpretation into the worship service. Could they get away from the traditional, one-way mode of sermonic communication, in which the preacher tells the congregation what she or he believes the Bible is saying, and they passively receive it?

In that spirit, Pastor Lentz “preached” on Jesus’ parable of the sower in the Gospel of Matthew. He began with a few brief introductory remarks to set up the passage. Parables, he explained, are like

extended metaphors, in which something familiar, like a story about planting seeds, is compared to something unfamiliar, like the kingdom of God. Scholars believe that the parable was Jesus’ signature mode of teaching—which is interesting because, like all metaphorical thinking, parables offer poetic meaning that is not easily nailed down in a simple equation of “this equals that.” Jesus’ parables often seem to confuse and complicate rather than clarify and simplify, even for his disciples.

With this particular parable in Matthew, there’s actually an interpretation that follows. But that explanation wasn’t originally part of the teaching. It was added later.

Timothy Beal teaches at Case Western Reserve University. This essay is excerpted from The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book. Copyright © 2011 by Timothy Beal. Used by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. All rights reserved.

Pastor Lentz proposed that we focus on the parable alone, let it stand without explanation, and see what we can see.

A member of the congregation read the passage.

Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen! (Matt. 13:2-9)

After a minute of silent reflection, Pastor Lentz invited people in the congregation to share their first impressions of the parable. A well-liked gentleman with a booming voice who regularly participates in adult education classes spoke first, summarizing the "Sunday school" version many people know. It's about God planting

seeds of grace and salvation in different people, he explained. Some people, maybe one in four, have "good soil" and the seed thrives in them; in most, however, it doesn't take.

"Are you familiar with that message?" the pastor asked the congregation. Nearly everyone nodded. "Well, how does it make you feel?" People began to perk up. Several scooted forward in their seats.

"I must be one of those bad guys with bad soil," one man said.

"I worry, what have I done with the seed in me?" a woman called out.

"Where's my seed?" a high school boy asked. Others laughed and nodded.

These honest first responses quickly broke open the text and the congregation. New possible meanings, rereadings, began to emerge. Maybe each of us has all kinds of soils in us. Have the birds gotten a bad rap? After all, they don't just take seeds away. They spread them to new places. Seeds have lots of chances to take. Surely Jesus' agriculturally minded audience would've known that.

What about the one sowing the seeds? Shouldn't he know where and where not to sow? Is he being rational, practical? He's just scattering seeds all

over the place, with no discretion. His actions seem downright wasteful and excessive. If we think of the sower as God, what does that say? Maybe that God is not stingy or even careful about where he scatters the seeds? That divine grace is lavishly, uneconomically, improvidently broadcast all over the place?

And what if we are the sowers? What does the life of faith look like from that angle? We too can be carelessly, wastefully free. As we talked and as the excitement of the congregation grew more and more palpable, I imagined children playing in heaps of seeds, tossing them into the air like balls in a McDonald's play area. An image of the kingdom of God.

Pastor Lentz had wisely trusted that simply hosting a gathering of these people and this text would produce new fruit, and he remained open to whatever surprises that might bring. By the end of the "sermon," the pastor's role had changed from preacher to facilitator. There was no wrapping up, no bringing it all back to a single point. The open-ended process of rereading had itself become a sacramental moment, a means of receiving and sharing seeds of grace. The many voices remained present in all their diversity of insight and experience, echoing in and through the final Amen.

The great rabbi Yosef Chaim once described the din of students reading, interpreting and debating passages of Torah in their house of study as words rising through the roof and up to heaven. The indecipherable racket of the many voices interpreting scripture was like a hymn of praise to God. He imagined God glorying in the ongoing, noisy process of interpretation, the cacophony of meanings without end.

In kindred spirit, what if we were to think of the word of God not as bound between two covers of a book but as that endless noise of interpretation, an inconclusive process that we are invited to join? What if that cacophonous hymn, rising up across time and space from digital networks, living rooms, lunchrooms, churches and bus stops is the living word of God? An endless, inarticulate din of talking, arguing, reading and rereading in the library of questions. The word as we live it. Word without end.

Zero

Zero isn't nothing.
My father,
a mathematician,
insisted on that.
When he helped me with my homework
and I said it was
his eyes would steady, voice grow stern.
He'd correct me,
try his best to make me understand.
I couldn't comprehend
his reason,
didn't really care.
What difference did it make?
Twenty years later
and she is gone.
Now I know.
I'm up to my eyes
in the shadow-black heart of it.

Mike Spikes

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A ministry team responds to disasters

Three years after a gunman opened fire and killed six people at a City Council meeting in Kirkwood, Missouri, pastor David A. Holyan found himself in Tucson, Arizona, within days after the January 8 shootings that killed six and injured 13, including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

Holyan, 46, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood, had become an accidental expert in what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calls “human-caused disaster” response. More precisely, he is a member of the three-person Presbyterian Disaster Assistance’s National Response Team.

Holyan’s expertise comes from the victim side. His church became a spiritual hub for the community in the wake of the shooting rampage on February 7, 2008, that claimed the lives of six people—including two of Holyan’s parishioners and the gunman.

In the hours after the 2008 shooting, Holyan was at the hospital with staff member Cathy Yost, whose husband, Kenneth, the city’s public works director, had been killed. “My instinct is to step into the hard places and be calm, but nothing prepares you for this,” Holyan said. “You can’t prepare for human-caused disaster. It rattles you to the core of your being.”

As he took in the scene of the shootings, his cell phone rang. It was Paul Reiter, the regional leader for the PCUSA. “He asked what I needed, and I said I didn’t know what I needed,” Holyan said. “He told me the PDA would show up soon. I said OK and hung up the phone. I had no idea how that would help.”

By the next day, a team from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance had flown in to help Holyan help his flock. That

weekend, as dazed parishioners looked to him for context and meaning, Holyan had to give a sermon that would attempt to make sense of the senseless.

The next day, he preached at Ken Yost’s funeral service. Kirkwood mayor Mike Swoboda, who was shot and died of complications seven months later, was also a member of First Presbyterian.

Holyan said those days were the hardest of his career, and they prepared him for his current role in PDA—able to provide perspective from the point of view of someone who has experienced horror firsthand.

When eight people were killed in a massive gas pipeline explosion in northern California in September, Holyan was part of the team called in to help. “It’s

very redemptive for me,” said Holyan. “The horror of what happened in Kirkwood was transformed to become wisdom for others going through a similar situation.”

Holyan flew to Tucson three days after the attack on Giffords and others, “showing up in the midst of mass confusion, bewilderment and shock,” he said.

The Missouri pastor was joined at the scene by Laurie Kraus, pastor of Riviera Presbyterian Church in Miami. Kraus has served on the PDA response team since its inception in 1996, according to Presbyterian News Service. The third member of the all-volunteer team in Tucson is retired businessman Rick Turner, a member of John Knox Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

One of the pastoral goals of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is the “stabilization of the ministry, not individuals,” Holyan said. Ultimately, the wider community is served by concentrating on religious leaders’ mental and physical health.

“You need those who are being pastoral to also be healthy,” he said. “They’re going to be the last ones aware of how affected they are. A pastor’s immediate instinct is to care for others first, then the bigger system, then finally themselves, when they figure out, ‘Wait a second, I have no energy left.’”

Invited to a meeting with Tucson clergy, the trio of Presbyterian responders encouraged them to allow people “space” before pushing toward healing. The pastor and his team were asked to attend the funeral of nine-year-old victim Christina Greene. They also visited Northminster Presbyterian Church where the oldest Tucson victim, Phyllis Schneck, 79, worshiped.

Holyan plans to return to Tucson in



IN A TIME OF TRAGEDY: David A. Holyan, a volunteer with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, gives the benediction at a memorial service for Kenneth Yost, who was among six people killed in a shooting in 2008 at a City Council meeting in Kirkwood, Missouri.

RNS / LAURIE SKRIVAN / ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

March and again in May to make sure religious leaders are healthy.

Return visits months and sometimes years later are typical for the PDA team and mental health professionals with special training, John Robinson, PDA associate for U.S. disaster response, told Presbyterian News Service.

In a letter to Linda Valentine, executive director of the PCUSA's General Assembly Mission Council, Kraus described her reaction to the sermons by clergy colleagues in Tucson right after the tragedy and on the Martin Luther King weekend: "I was struck, as I always am, by the integrity, authenticity and vulnerability of faith leaders who step into the pain and chaos of a human-caused disaster with words of honesty and calls for the church's meaningful participation in the healing of the community." —Tim Townsend, RNS and Presbyterian News Service

U.S. judge rules against Lutheran retirees' claims

In a blow to retirees of a major Lutheran publishing house, a federal judge has ruled that the now-dissolved pension plan of Augsburg Fortress was exempt from federal regulations that would have required it to meet minimum funding levels.

But the case remains open as pensioners—who say they're owed as much as \$40 million—received a green light to keep pressing breach-of-contract claims under state law.

The January 27 ruling by Minnesota's U.S. District Judge Michael Davis marked a partial victory for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its publishing arm, Augsburg Fortress.

Davis ruled that Augsburg Fortress's pension was a "church plan," making it exempt from regulations that cover other pension programs under the 1974 Employee Retirement Income Security Act, or ERISA.

"We're very pleased with the result," said Beth Lewis, president and CEO of Augsburg Fortress. "It means that we continue to publish fine resources for the church and focus on our business, which is also a ministry."

UCC suspends ex-president who admitted to affair

The former president of the United Church of Christ has been suspended for one year and ordered to undergo a "program of growth" after he admitted last year to an affair with a former co-worker.

The UCC announced January 21 that an association within the denomination's Ohio Conference would oversee a ministerial fitness review of John H. Thomas, former general minister and president.

Thomas expressed dismay that within 12 hours of a call alerting him to the decision, preparations were under way to make the action public. He said word was being circulated before he had time



Former United Church of Christ general minister and president John H. Thomas

to talk with his family or consult with colleagues about the suspension.

David T. Hill, an official with the association and a pastor in Oberlin, said Thomas's ministerial standing had been suspended for at least a year, "with reinstatement of standing contingent upon completion of a prescribed program of growth."

Due to term limits, Thomas left office in 2009 after serving as president for a decade. In August 2010, the church announced that he was divorcing his wife and said "he has formed a relationship with another woman with whom he worked" within the Cleveland-based denomination.

Thomas, now a visiting professor at UCC-affiliated Chicago Theological Seminary and adviser to seminary president Alice Hunt, voiced his displeasure in regard to the decision being made public after a brief interval. "Quite apart from lacking any sense of human decency, this so violates what I understand to be concern for the sanctity and confidentiality of church and ministry proceedings," he said.

"However, given the voyeuristic nature of the church's approach to intimate details of my personal life over the past few months, I guess I should not be surprised," he said in a statement requested and released by the UCC.

Geoffrey A. Black, the current UCC president, said in a statement he was "very saddened" by the events that led to the decision. "It is my prayer that as a church, we will be gracious and compassionate with each other and move forward together in search of healing and reconciliation." —RNS

The ELCA also welcomed the ruling, which dismissed seven of nine claims against the denomination.

"The ruling is . . . consistent with 30 years of federal agency determinations that church-affiliated employers, like a publishing agency that is affiliated with a denomination, can maintain a church plan," said Ruth S. Marcott, an attorney representing the ELCA, in a statement.

Augsburg Fortress terminated its pension plan on December 31, 2009. Three months later, the publisher distributed the remaining \$8.2 million in lump sum payments, which stakeholders said were worth a fraction of what they'd expected to receive over their lifetimes.

After years of underfunding and a financial crisis that battered investments, Augsburg had no good choices, Lewis argued. Terminating the program marked a more "equitable" solution, she said, than letting funds run out within five years and leaving most stakeholders with nothing.

The plaintiffs' attorney, Richard Lockridge, argued that if the Augsburg plan is in fact a church plan, then its affiliated church—the ELCA—is obligated to make amends for Augsburg's broken pension promises. He plans to press for an expedited trial on behalf of an estimated 500 pensioners. —Jeffrey MacDonald, RNS

Pew study charts growth in Muslim population

The U.S. Muslim population is expected to double over the next 20 years, fueled by immigration and higher than average fertility rates, according to a new Pew report.

The study comes as some critics accuse Muslim Americans of seeking to impose Shari'a, or Islamic law, in the U.S., and some Europeans raise the specter of a Muslim-dominated "Eurabia" if countries don't tighten immigration. The fears are overblown, the report said.

"The numbers are very far away from the Eurabia scenario of runaway growth," said Alan Cooperman, one of the coauthors of the report, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population," released in Washington on January 27 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The number of Muslims in the United States is projected to rise from 2.6 million,

or 0.8 percent of the U.S. population, to 6.2 million, or 1.7 percent in 2030. That rate of growth would make Muslims about as numerous as Jews or Episcopalians in the U.S. today.

Although Muslim populations in some Western countries are expected to double in the next 20 years, they would still not be high enough to fundamentally shift the religious or ethnic balance of European societies, the authors said.

Even some conservatives expressed skepticism at the idea of homegrown Islamic fundamentalism threatening to overtake the U.S. "We welcome all Muslims here who pledge allegiance to the Constitution and believe in the separation of religion and state," said Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Liberty Commission. "I don't worry about Shari'a creep because Americans won't let it happen."

Researchers also found that nearly two-thirds (64.5 percent) of Muslim Americans are immigrants, while 35.5 percent were born in the U.S.—a figure

that is projected to rise to almost 45 percent by 2030.

On the assumption that many of these young immigrants start families, the number of U.S. Muslims younger than 15 will more than triple by 2030, to 1.8 million in 2030.

According to the report, the world's Muslim population is expected to increase by about 35 percent in the next 20 years—rising from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030—compared to a general population growth rate of about 16 percent.

If current trends continue, Muslims will make up 26.4 percent of the world's total projected population of 8.3 billion in 2030, up from 23.4 percent of the estimated 2010 world population of 6.9 billion. —RNS

Rabbis petition Murdoch to crack down on Fox's Holocaust references

Hundreds of American rabbis used Holocaust Remembrance Day last month to push media mogul Rupert Murdoch to "sanction" Glenn Beck and other Fox News personalities on the use of Nazi and Holocaust references.

The "Sanction Glenn Beck" letter on January 27 responds to Beck's three-part series last November on billionaire philanthropist and Holocaust survivor George Soros, whom Beck smeared as a "Jewish boy helping send the Jews to the death camps."

Fox News chief Roger Ailes has dismissed the critics as "left-wing rabbis who basically don't think that anybody can ever use the word 'Holocaust' on the air."

Mik Moore, chief strategic officer of Jewish Funds for Justice, said his nonprofit group organized the response over the past two months, prompted by "a lot of calls from rabbis expressing their outrage."

The coalition, which also objected to Ailes's use of the term *Nazis* in describing the NPR executives who fired Fox News commentator Juan Williams, wants an apology from Ailes and action taken against Beck.

Church leaders praise new travel policy on Cuba

FAITH LEADERS with long-term ties to Cuban organizations are hailing a change in White House policy that reduces restrictions on religious travel to the island nation.

The White House announced January 14 that President Obama had directed changes that include permitting religious organizations to sponsor trips under a general license. The administration also will create a general license that permits remittances to religious institutions in Cuba that support religious activities.

"The president believes these actions, combined with the continuation of the embargo, are important steps in reaching the widely shared goal of a Cuba that respects the basic rights of all its citizens," the statement said.

During a November meeting in the White House, officials with the National Council of Churches had asked Obama to address limitations on travel to Cuba by U.S. religious leaders.

"The White House announcement is an important first step toward more just and open relations between the U.S. and Cuba," said Michael Kinnamon, NCC general secretary. "We look forward to the day when the U.S. embargo of Cuba will be lifted completely."

United Methodists said its Board of Global Ministries and other religious organizations had general travel and general fund transfer licenses prior to a tightening of the economic embargo during the recent Bush administration.

"Our prayer is that the new regulations, when published, will restore opportunities to obtain such licenses," said Thomas Kemper, the top executive of the global ministries agency, in a January 20 statement.

The changes—which are expected to take effect this month—were also welcomed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as a positive move to help the Cuban people. —RNS

King's daughter declines helm of SCLC

FIFTEEN MONTHS after being tapped to head the civil rights group founded by her famous father, Bernice King has declined the post, citing a leadership clash and an inability to “move forward.”

King's decision leaves the venerable Southern Christian Leadership Conference again facing an uncertain future, a half century after it was founded to mobilize black churches in Martin Luther King's fight against discrimination.

“After numerous attempts to connect with the official board leaders on how to move forward under my leadership, unfortunately our visions did not align,” King said in statement on January 21. Instead, she said, she plans to work with immigration activist Samuel Rodriguez, whose National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference is modeled on the SCLC, and work to develop the legacy of her mother, Coretta Scott King.

Founded in 1957, the Atlanta-based SCLC has been wracked by turmoil

over financial and leadership fights that landed in a state court. In September, a judge ruled that a board faction that attempted to have its own meetings had acted improperly.

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes said the SCLC, like other civil rights organizations, is grappling with how to operate in a new generation with new identities. “We’ve reached a point where black communities are going through a transition in terms of who we are,” said Gilkes, a professor of African-American studies at Colby College in Maine.

SCLC leaders say the organization will forge ahead despite not having a member of the King family at the top.

Bernice King, a motivational speaker and a minister at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church near Atlanta, could not be reached for comment about the specifics of her plans. But Rodriguez said he expects that he and King will launch their joint initiative by June, focusing on immigration reform and the high dropout rates among black and Latino high school students. —RNS

“It is not appropriate to accuse a 14-year-old Jew hiding with a Christian family in Nazi-occupied Hungary of sending his people to death camps,” stated the letter in reference to Soros; the letter ran in a full-page ad in the Murdoch-owned *Wall Street Journal*.

“It is not appropriate to call executives of another news agency ‘Nazis.’ And it is not appropriate to make literally hundreds of on-air references to the Holocaust and Nazis when characterizing people with whom you disagree.”

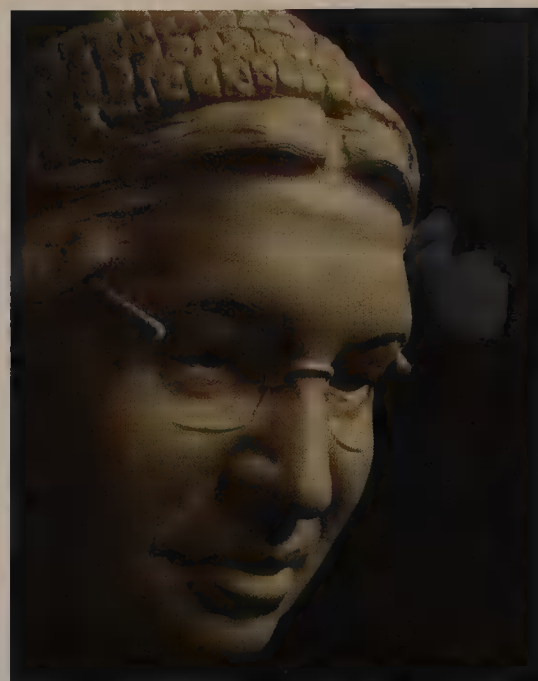
Joel Cheatwood, Fox News senior vice president of development, told the Reuters news agency that the group of rabbis is a “George Soros-backed left-wing political organization that has been trying to engage Glenn Beck primarily for publicity purposes.”

The rabbis span the political and religious spectrum, though only a handful

represent the Orthodox Jewish community. Charitable donations from Soros have helped fund some Jewish Funds for Justice youth programs, Moore said, but Soros himself was not involved in this response.

“If [Cheatwood] wants to be that dismissive of 400-plus rabbis, that’s his call,” Moore said, adding that “at a time when much of the country, including many public voices, is doing some soul-searching about the post-Tucson conversation, it doesn’t feel like that’s happening at Fox News.”

The United Nations established January 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2005, marking the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Jews also mourn the Holocaust on Yom Hashoah, an observance that falls on May 2 this year. —Nicole Neroulis, RNS



RNS / COURTESY CHAS FAGAN

CATHEDRAL CARVINGS: A clay model of civil rights heroine Rosa Parks by Chas Fagan is being used to carve a stone sculpture of her in the “human rights porch” archway in Washington National Cathedral’s narthex. The Parks sculpture will join that of Nobel Peace Prize-winning nun Mother Teresa. Others already enshrined in the portal include Oscar Romero, slain Salvadoran archbishop, and John Walker, the first black Episcopal bishop of Washington.

At Institute of Peace religions play role in peacemaking efforts

Just steps from the Lincoln Memorial, a new building—topped by a translucent white roof that resembles the wings of a giant dove—is puzzling tourists and commuters alike.

What is it? Who works there? The answer is the United States Institute of Peace, which is often followed by some variation of “The what?”

The new headquarters of the 27-year-old independent institute, scheduled to open to the public in September, is designed to raise the profile of the agency.

The new building was likened to a temple by Qamar-ul Huda, a senior program officer in USIP’s Religion and Peacemaking program. All over Wash-

ington “we have monuments to those who fought in wars,” he said, “and rightly so, but we don’t recognize the peacemakers. This building helps.” Its closest neighbors at the northwest corner of the Washington Mall will be the Korean War and Vietnam War memorials.

The new site could draw attention to Huda’s small but increasingly active program, which studies the role of religion in war and peace and engages religious leaders in peacemaking.

Plenty of universities and independent think tanks are working at the nexus of religion and peace, said Ambassador Dane F. Smith, a senior adviser on Darfur at the State Department who has written a book about American peace-building institutions.

But USIP is a congressionally chartered, taxpayer-funded institute. Its willingness to work with religious leaders contrasts with the conventional approach elsewhere in government, said Smith. “The guidance to diplomats in the field is that they can meet with religious leaders—but don’t go too far,” Smith said.

The 325 employees at the nonpartisan institute work outside the administration’s foreign policy apparatus at the neighboring State Department, and they can’t make government policy. The board, appointed by the president, must be equally divided between Republicans and Democrats.

USIP’s annual \$44 million operating budget is dwarfed by the State Department’s—\$54 billion in fiscal year 2010. Congress allotted \$100 million for the new, 150,000-square-foot headquarters, which was designed by Massachusetts-based architect Moshe Safdie and will cost \$183 million. USIP must raise the balance from the private sector.

A group of donors has paid for a wing named for Madeleine Albright, secretary of state in the Clinton White House, who probed the role of religion in foreign affairs in her 2006 book, *The Mighty and the Almighty*. Chevron Corporation donated a wing named for George Schultz, who held the job under President Reagan, and defense contractor Lockheed Martin endowed a lecture series with a \$1 million gift.



MAKING PEACE: The new headquarters for the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington may raise the profile of the 27-year-old agency, including its religion and peace initiatives. It is scheduled to open in September.

With advanced teleconferencing capabilities, the building will allow peacemakers from the world over to meet virtually. A large interactive exhibition space is expected to draw up to 500,000 visitors annually to highlight the institute’s scholarship and work in the field.

That fieldwork includes efforts to integrate former rebels in the Niger Delta back into their communities, creating a database on human rights violations in Afghanistan and hosting a roundtable of experts on the developing crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

The institute’s Religion and Peacemaking program, which has a \$1 million budget and four staffers, focuses on places where religion may hold the keys to peace.

For example, the program is organizing exchanges between Muslims in Iran

and the U.S. In Afghanistan, it is teaching conflict management skills to Islamic religious scholars. In Colombia, it helped organize a conference of Catholic and Protestant women seeking ways to reduce violence through their churches.

David Smock, who heads the Religion and Peacemaking program, helped broker a 2005 peace agreement between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria.

An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, Smock worked with a Nigerian pastor and imam at the negotiating table. Their story was featured in a documentary, *The Imam and the Pastor*, which the agency dubbed into Arabic and sent to Iraq to be used as a model of successful interfaith cooperation.

Huda also leads a project to distribute a textbook on conflict resolution to Islamic schools in Pakistan. Written in Urdu by Huda and a group of Pakistani religious scholars, *Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam: A Textbook for Students* explores the personal and societal roots of conflict and encourages students to examine their own biases. It is now used by 100 teachers in 60 madrasahs.

Huda holds a doctorate in Islamic studies from UCLA, and he also studied in traditional Islamic seminaries in Pakistan, Egypt and Syria. He said USIP staff—as government employees—are mindful of the separation of church and state and are careful not to promote any religion. But they also don’t shy away from trying to work with religionists and draw upon religious traditions to foster peace.

Seeing religion less as a root of conflict and more as an opportunity for peace is welcome and rather rare within American foreign policy circles, said Lisa Schirch, a professor at Eastern Mennonite University’s graduate Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.

“Current research is showing how the U.S. government often underplays the role of religion in diplomacy,” Schirch said. “For too long, it has overlooked religious leaders’ moral influence, and their power to promote peace outside more formal diplomatic channels.” —Lauren Markoe, RNS

Catholic hospitals, bishops reach accord

In the wake of public spats between the Catholic hierarchy and health-care executives, the Catholic Health Association publicly acknowledged that bishops—not doctors or hospital ethicists—have the final say on questions of medical morality.

The concession came in letters made public on January 31 between Sister Carol Keehan, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association, and Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Disputes between health-care executives and bishops have intensified as Catholic authorities wrestle with increasingly complex moral quandaries in the country's more than 600 church-affiliated hospitals.

Keehan has clashed with the bishops over last year's health-care reform law and over a surgery performed last year at an Arizona Catholic hospital that Phoenix bishop Thomas Olmsted called an abortion. Olmsted later stripped St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center of its Catholic status and excommunicated its chief ethicist, Sister Margaret McBride.

Keehan had backed the hospital in the dispute, saying it had correctly interpreted the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, a set of moral guidelines written by the USCCB.

In her letter, Keehan conceded that only a bishop's interpretation of the Ethical and Religious Directives is authoritative. A bishop also has the right "to develop his own ethical and religious directives if he chooses," Keehan wrote.

Dolan, too, underscored the point. "Where conflicts arise, it is again the bishop who provides the authoritative resolution based on his teaching office," he said.

He said the CHA and the bishops should now work together for legislation that would ensure no federal money is used for elective abortions and to strengthen conscience protections for Catholic health-care workers.

"The purpose of these letters is to put

all this behind them and move on with a united legislative strategy on both the federal and state level," said Thomas Reese, senior fellow at Georgetown University's Woodstock Theological Center. —Daniel Burke, RNS

After dispute over lesbian coach, Belmont clarifies antidiscrimination policy

Trustees at Belmont University in Nashville have voted to add sexual orientation to the historically Baptist school's antidiscrimination policy. In December Belmont parted ways with a successful women's soccer coach, Lisa Howe, after she told her team that she and her same-sex partner were expecting a baby.

The controversy captured national attention in sporting news and prompted discussions among campus groups about whether the private, Christian university discriminates against gays.

Belmont president Bob Fisher said January 26 that the trustees' addition of sexual orientation to the school's policy against discrimination simply puts into writing what was already being practiced.

During his 11 years as president, Fisher said, sexual orientation "has not been considered in student admissions nor in hiring, promotion, salary or dismissal decisions."

For more than 50 years Belmont was affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention. Those ties ended in 2007, with the settlement of a lawsuit over whether trustees had the right to elect their own successors instead of those selected by the convention.

Randy Davis, executive director of the state convention, told Baptist Press that Belmont had walked away from its "Christian heritage and roots."

Howe, the former soccer coach who reportedly stepped down in mutual agreement with the administration, told local media that she is pleased with the new antidiscrimination policy but is pursuing several job leads and doesn't plan to reapply at Belmont. —ABP

Briefly noted

■ The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has announced deep staff cuts, citing lingering financial woes. The Atlanta-based fellowship will cut 13 positions, reducing the staff to 42 full-time positions. The downsizing follows two straight years of contingency spending to cope with budget shortfalls. "These have been among the most difficult decisions I've had to make during my tenure at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," said Daniel Vestal, the fellowship's executive coordinator since 1996.

■ The murder of Ugandan gay rights activist David Kato has caused outrage among Episcopalians who have denounced homophobia. Kato was bludgeoned to death on January 26. Local police said the motive was robbery. But Kato had received several death threats since October 2010 when his photo appeared in a newspaper alongside that of former Ugandan Anglican bishop Christopher Senyonjo under the headline "Hang Them." Current laws dealing with homosexuality carry sentences of up to life imprisonment. Cynthia Black, interim rector of the Church of the Epiphany in Plymouth, Minnesota, said that Kato was "a valiant crusader" for human rights. Bruce Garner, a member of the Episcopal Church's Executive Council, told the news service that he believes the situation in Uganda "has come about because of the insistence of some faith groups on very narrow and literal interpretation of certain portions of scripture, particularly those dealing with human sexuality, especially same-gender sexual activity."

■ The Vatican has announced a new initiative aimed at promoting dialogue between theists and atheists to be launched with a two-day event in March in Paris. The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture will sponsor seminars on the theme of "Religion, Light and Common Reason" at various locations in the city, including Paris-Sorbonne University. The events will conclude with a party for youth in the courtyard of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, followed by prayer and meditation inside the cathedral. The pope has made turning back the tide of Western secularism one of the major campaigns of his papacy.

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, February 27
Matthew 6:24-34

AT 28, SCOTT Harrison asked himself, “What would the opposite of my life look like?” As a businessman in New York, he had all the signs of success. But after asking himself this question, he used his considerable gifts in marketing to establish the organization charity: water, which is dedicated to providing safe water for those who don’t have access to it.

The use of his natural gifts impresses me. We have within us all that we need to begin to see and think and then act in ways we have not thought possible. *Wealth*, after all, is a neutral word. It can refer to anything from affluent prosperity to whatever it is that one treasures.

While everyone has a relative or friend who is making good money because he or she is particularly skilled at money management, most of us are just getting by, and some of us are living at the edge of our means. In the past several years that edge has become a high cliff for many people. Many are asking: Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? In this one simple question, vastly different worldviews are presented and challenged in an instant. How we understand and respond to this passage in Matthew depends on our context: on whether we’re sitting in a new bistro in Brooklyn or waiting in line in Bangladesh for a bag of flour.

The debate within the church and the wider society revolves around justice and social order, and about which comes first. It is not a new debate for Christians—we are still being called to examine how, when and where we respond. Less than half a mile from my seminary office are two churches that address this tension every day. Each congregation is blessed with magnificent buildings that were built in another era. Now they have become centers that offer day care, sports programs, food pantries, shelter and cooperative community health programs, as well as microcredit programs available during the current economic crisis. This innovation takes Jesus’ food-and-clothing question seriously.

I grew up with a simple notion: money was a necessary evil, and there was not enough of it. Somewhere along the line, the concept of easy credit was introduced, and my family suddenly had more things: a new washer and dryer, for example, bought on credit and paid for over time. We no longer had to wait months or even years. Instead, when one item was paid for, we could purchase the next thing we needed—a piece of furniture or an item of clothing. The power of Jesus’ words speaks to the issues of wealth, anxiety and yes, even to the temptation to indulge in easy credit. Perhaps his words are too

simple, too basic for our world’s complexity of credit and sophisticated terminology. But I don’t think so.

Jesus calls us to a new kind of reality. His intent is less about judging and more about calling us to understand our motives and our own questions in relation to his question. The dilemma for us as Christians is our particular place in the world and the perspective that it gives us. Too much of the time we use the verses from Matthew to erase our thinking about our place and our less than noble motives. We want to block the reality of starvation and lack of shelter and clothing because we are numb of heart and spirit. Some of this numbness is because we have too much; some of it is because we are keenly aware that others do not have enough. Some of our numbness is because we need to hear “Don’t worry” in regard to the stresses of our lives.

How are we to have a proper notion of accountability? Jesus brings up this topic of possessions, food and clothing again and again. Why did he give us this dilemma to ponder? Maybe Jesus and his followers were facing the issues of hunger and worry about adequate clothing every day. Most likely this was more than a philosophical or theological discussion.

The tension continues today. The few who have too much and yet are poor in spirit search for meaning that will give them a purposeful life, while too many in the world are hungry and always anxious about finding the next bit of food—they can think about nothing else. In a shrinking world the two realities are quickly pushing and pulling against each other thanks to our global connections.

A lot of the responsibility rests with those who have the resources and the wealth, and especially with those who stake out a claim of serving God. Jesus says that this responsibility is never finished and that this question of wealth must be a primary question for us. It is not answered by replacing angst about malnourished children with judgment, or by tugging comforting phrases out of the text as salve for selfishness. It requires us to ask ourselves again and again—how did this wealth accumulate and is anyone hungry because of it?

Say what you will, Jesus makes one clear call here. Which will we serve—wealth or the Divine Source of all that is and will be? How far do we take this “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” The words cut through to how well or how poorly we deal with our wealth. If we follow Jesus, these words are vital to how we live our lives and manage our money and resources. We are to reach for what takes precedence in our lives, knowing that we are forgiven and can approach this calling without guilt or shame.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, March 6
Matthew 17:1-9

I SPENT MY EARLY childhood on the high altiplano of Bolivia, where we took for granted spectacular views of mountains and lakes. I hiked the hills, explored caves and played among the Incan ruins. My siblings and I would accompany my parents by boat to villages and towns scattered around Lake Titicaca. Late-afternoon storms would come up quickly, churning the water, flashing sheet lightning and sometimes producing golf ball-size hail.

When I think about the transfiguration, I see those mountains again in all of their grandeur. I understand why earlier civilizations believed that mountains are close to the heavens; they have always symbolized a place where one may meet the holy.

But in the 21st century, many of us don't live in the mountains or even outside of a city. What are we to think when we're invited into a story about a mountain shrouded in clouds? After all, this is no ordinary hike, and these are no ordinary clouds—they indicate the most Holy Presence.

If such an experience were to happen to us, how would we tell anyone about it? When a human moves from the flat, hot landscape of the ordinary into this extraordinary space, he or she finds fresh air and a vista pointing to vision and possibility. For Jesus' followers, there may have been the rush of wind, the swish and swirl of soft whiteness, a deep sense of shared experience.

There may also have been fear. For these men the moment caused them to take a step back as they reacted in wonder and even shock. It is the same for us: such an experience may frighten us to the core. We read the words in Matthew and hesitate, and in our unbelief we fail to experience the necessary fear, a God-induced fear of the possible, of the Savior present for our sake.

Why are we afraid and confused? In this seemingly silent text we experience what David Jaspers calls the "ambiguity and paradox of soundless sound." Matthew's story is a micro-narrative without time and distance and space. This is the gospel extraordinariness of it all. We interpret the purpose of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in many ways, and too often our views take on a life of their own, pulling and grasping at us even as they validate a comfortable sameness and safety. We will do anything to try to mute and even contain the extraordinary message of this gospel narrative.

Ironically, in spite of their fear, the followers of Jesus want-

ed to pitch a tent and stay on the mountaintop. Perhaps their own rich narrative of faith, filled with their encounters with the holy, helped them hear the voice that claims a new way, a renewed hope and a powerful assurance of relationship. It's something that we 21st-century followers want too; we want to stay in the transfigured moment.

When such an experience happens to us, we are mesmerized as if by a scene captured in a snow globe or by fireworks lighting up the night sky. The flakes floating inside the magic globe finally settle on the ground; the fireworks are impossible to capture and keep. So it is with transformation and transfiguration. The elevated moments on the mountain are bound up in the ordinary and the sacred.

The search for the holy continues and will not go away despite predictions to the contrary. The yearning to find healing for the split between mind and heart permeates everyday conversation and stirs us to search high and low for answers. Often we are confounded and frustrated—sometimes feeling closer to the holy, then farther away again. Like mountain climbers, we make our way again and again up the side of the steep surface, even though we are warned that at the top of a

The search for the holy continues and will not go away.

mountain, clouds can suddenly wash over everything, blocking the view and confusing the climber, just as huge jets are grounded when clouds become too dense, too near.

One late autumn evening north of Tucson, Arizona, I sat outside and saw the strange glow of a full moon rising between mountain and clouds. The moon seemed to be moving, and as I timed its rising from behind the mountain (it took five minutes to emerge), I felt that if I stood at the right place at the right time, I might touch its silvery surface.

I know that the moon does not rise, and that it is the earth that is rotating. But for a moment that night I was convinced that it was not the earth but the moon that was moving.

We dare not discount the power of transformation. After all, there are Moses and Elijah, who teach us about the human struggle to grasp what our faith offers. And there are the companions of Jesus coming down the mountain, knowing that they were firmly grounded in a future that's yet to come.

The author is Susan Kendall, a Presbyterian pastor and director of the doctor of ministry program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

Formative moments

The term theological education brings to mind formal study in seminary classrooms or other institutions. But people's deepest convictions about God and their deepest stirrings of faith are often formed at an early age. They may spend their later years in the classroom, in ministry or in other careers exploring and deepening—or struggling with—convictions that were inspired early in life. Here are seven reflections on formative experiences.

Six hours at a summer church camp altar in 1977 set the trajectory for my life. It was then, at the age of 12, that over the course of three nights I experienced what Pentecostals call the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Responding to the invitation at the end of the evening to receive more of God, my friends and I encountered God in such a palpable way that I think we caught a glimpse of what the Gospel writer said would happen when the Spirit is given and received: “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37). We prayed, cried, worshiped, spoke in unknown tongues and simply soaked in the presence of God. I have never been the same.

Later, when I was going through theological seminary and encountering all kinds of doctrines and ideas that challenged my Pentecostal worldview, I was tempted to leave the church that had nurtured me in the faith. But unlike previous generations of Pentecostals, I had mentors who suggested that it was possible to be something that was once considered an oxymoron—a Pentecostal scholar!—and that I could do so precisely by pursuing the vocation of the mind as an authentic expression of a Spirit-filled life.

This doesn’t mean that I have since parroted what I learned growing up. But everything I have written and published has been part of a quest to understand at a deeper theological level this encounter with the Spirit of the living God, undeniably registered in my preteen years.

What does it mean that the Spirit of God and of Jesus Christ takes up residence in human hearts in life-transforming ways? This is the mystery at the heart of the gospel of God’s redeeming the world in Christ by the Spirit, and my own theological work has repeatedly returned to trying to understand this afresh.

When I was invited to join the faculty at Regent University School of Divinity and to work especially with a new Ph.D. program in renewal studies, I discerned that this was simply the next step charted by the Spirit wherein I could continue to learn more about what had happened on those summer nights. And I might now be a source of encouragement for others with

similar experiences who find themselves on a path of theological inquiry.

—**Amos Yong**, who teaches theology at Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia Beach

I remember a conversation my mother and I had one day after worship in the small rural church in which I grew up and where she and my dad are active members to this day. The preacher had preached on the passage “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34), a text that in its evangelical simplicity and Elizabethan beauty was utterly indecipherable for a small child. I knew it must be important. It was in red in my Bible.

On the way to the car, I asked my mother what it meant. “Hmmm, I guess it means that Jesus doesn’t want us to worry about the future,” she said. “There’s enough for us to worry about today.”

What has stayed with me was the natural way my mother talked about theology.

That was a lesson my mother, a child of the Great Depression, knew by heart. She then invited me to read the passage with her in the context of the whole text, and gradually the meaning came into focus for me.

What has stayed with me from that conversation was the natural way my mother talked about theological matters. Or, perhaps more, it was the way in which my mother bridged the mundane and the theological seamlessly.

Of all the talks I had with my mother as a child, this one has stuck with me for 50 years—and not least the precise phrasing of that passage from Matthew’s Gospel. A contemporary educational researcher could explain to us why it is that something hard to read stays with us better and longer than something easily understood. I suspect that at some intuitive level my mother, and maybe the translators of the Authorized Version, and perhaps our Lord, understood this too. We learn best those things that require some unraveling. “Let those who have ears to hear, hear” and all that.

The longer I spend at the graduate level of theological education the more convinced I am that primary theological education is best done when it invites us into the project of deciphering, unraveling, interpreting, figuring things out. My mother probably had no idea how important it was that day that she took the time to read that text with me. She certainly had no idea how important it was to start her lesson with, “Hmmm, I guess . . .” But 50 years later, it’s what I do with students on a pretty regular basis.

—**Michael Jenkins**, president of Louisville Theological Seminary

At age 12 I decided (with lots of encouragement) to become a communicant member of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Alabama. The communicant’s class met with our pastor six Saturday mornings for two-hour sessions. I don’t recall specifics; by 1968 our congregation no longer required memorizing the Shorter Catechism. But I do remember how important and grown-up it felt having conversations about faith in our pastor’s study—not his office—surrounded by stacks of well-worn commentaries and theology texts. A decade later I would attend the same seminary that trained my pastor, reading some of those same tomes I saw on his bookshelves.

It’s one thing to admire texts; it’s another to perform them. In 1972, two high school friends and I attended a performance of the off-Broadway musical *Godspell*. Enthralled, the three of us lobbied to produce the play with our youth group. Though the music score was widely available, royalties for the book were prohibitive.

“You could just sing the songs,” youth advisers suggested. “But the songs won’t make sense without the script,” we argued. “Besides, we know where they got their material. We’ll write our own script!”

In crafting an adaptation of *Godspell* we drew liberally on our memory of the professional cast’s costume designs and theater techniques. We also drew liberally on scripture, immersing ourselves in the parables and passion stories of Jesus, reading our own lives into these ancient tales as we drafted dialogue, blocked scenes and assumed character roles.

Coached by caring adults, our acting troupe played these texts, improvised facial expressions, gestures and one-liners, and discovered that we were joining the story in ways we could not have imagined from the outset. One moment we were Jesus’ eager, befuddled disciples. The next moment we became self-righteous ingrates, a herd of pigs, the very ones who would betray and abandon Jesus on his way to Calvary. To this

day I have a fondness for Pharisees because I played one on stage.

I don’t recall my baptism as an infant, though by grace those waters marked me for the lifelong path of discipleship. I hardly recall the content of our communicant’s class, though by grace those sessions stirred my budding theological imagination. But I will always remember how, by grace, *Godspell* ushered me into that “strange new world within the Bible” (Barth), prompted me to rehearse my role onstage and off in God’s unfolding story, and directed me toward the company of others for whom “the chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy God forever.”

—**Don C. Richter**, a Presbyterian minister and associate director of the Louisville Institute. He founded and directed the Youth Theology Institute at Candler School of Theology.

My formal theological training began and ended with a course on the scriptures in eighth grade, leaving me with all the faults of the autodidact and a paper on what, with an adolescent’s callow complacency, I termed the “affair” of David and Bathsheba. The foundations of my faith, nurtured by early exposure to the Bible and hymns, lie in song and story.

As a child I was particularly drawn by the tales of the Israelites in the desert, the images of the pillars of cloud and of fire. I was appalled at the people’s persistent rejection of God, little knowing that as an adult I would come to know this condition well. Jesus seemed OK, but I much preferred the narrative punch of the Old Testament.

When I was in my thirties, just beginning to rediscover my faith, a well-meaning Benedictine monk mailed me a copy of Hans Küng’s *Does God Exist?* That was not the question for me. After reading a few paragraphs, I sent the book back. Fortunately, he had also scribbled a note: “If this doesn’t work, try Flannery O’Connor’s *The Habit of Being*.” And that was exactly what I needed: the letters of a passionate Christian who admits that “most of us come to the church by a means the church does not allow.”

It seems that I am always returning to the origins of my faith, the inexhaustible stories of scripture and the poetic imagery of the Psalms. I need a God who created whales to play with and makes hills leap for joy, a God who calls each star by its name. I need those resonances, images and metaphors that, like God, are beyond my understanding. They speak to me in a way that nothing else can.

—**Kathleen Norris**, who recently wrote *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer’s Life*



Kigali, Rwanda

I am thinking of
a thousand hills
and banana beer
and the fast moving
low resting
dawn breaking clouds
which must wake God
in the country where He sleeps.

and I have seen Him there
cupping black dirt in His hands
smoothing out the curves of each valley
and rounding off the crest of each hill
a thousand times over
like lumps in a pillow
or my mother's rising bread.

yes, I have seen Him there
cupping black dirt in His hands
smoothing out the curves
of each hip and shoulder
rounding off the tips
of each finger and toe
a million times over
slow and steady
like love and laughter
or the flicker of my father's youth.

and I don't suppose God slept
a moment in the spring of '94
when the rain all smelled like salt
and Kigali held its breath
like a baby in a basket.

and I have seen Him there
cupping black dirt in His hands
smoothing out the curves
of each tiny tomb
for the sparrows they cut
from the sky
too many times over,
swift
and sharp
like winter in the blood
or the flutter of a broken wing.

and every time I see Him now
He is braiding black feathers
and painting justice on the grass
where elephants fight
on trampled ground
at the foot of His bed
for tootsie rolls and peanuts.

Wesley Huth

My mother, after having experienced the power of the charismatic renewal in the early 1970s, cornered my father, a faithful Lutheran pastor, with the following critique: "If Lutheran theology is so good, how did it miss the Holy Spirit?" He had no compelling reply, even after studying again his books from seminary. He later followed her and my brother into the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

Later vacations were dedicated to figuring out what had just happened to our family. What was the right parochial language to grasp this ecumenical phenomenon? Could our tradition adequately explain the experience or would we need our Pentecostal friends for answers?

While still in high school my oldest brother, Karl, took the leap into the uncharted waters of spiritual renewal. At first, the rest of the family just watched from the shoreline. Karl would later go on to college and lead—as a Lutheran—two different campus groups: Inter-Varsity and the Baptist Student Union. Ecumenism was born into our family.

Karl was given these opportunities because of his considerable gifts for leadership. The only thing slowing him down, from his premature birth on, was cerebral palsy. He would motivate large groups with his preaching; then they would pray for God to straighten his legs. I can't count how many groups

My family's ecumenical experience included "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

laid hands on Karl as a spiritual project. "It's God's will," they confidently claimed. Their prayers for healing created disappointment, accusations and spiritual confusion in these groups and, ultimately, in our family. Why doesn't the Great Physician act? The answers were never kind.

Karl's life, a spiritual roller coaster, has been extremely formational for our family. Key questions resonate again and again—questions about the relationship between renewal and tradition; healing and doubt; mission and failure; power and weakness; Mephibosheth and the pain in Paul's side.

These lessons have become particularly instructive for me now that I'm the president of a seminary. We educate missional leaders. We want these leaders to transform congregations. Karl's life has taught me critical lessons about the dynamics of this kind of transformative leadership; it is Spirit-filled, passionate about communicating the faith, driven by mission, adaptive in strategy and style and, ironically, not afraid of vulnerability and weakness. The lessons of 2 Cor. 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made known in weakness," a text my brother embodies, still call and challenge me.

Karl ministers today to a Lutheran congregation from a wheelchair. The congregation is small but thriving. The lessons about the Holy Spirit and mission continue.

—Richard H. Bliese, president of Luther Seminary.

One Sunday morning in the late 1950s, as I inched along in the line waiting to shake hands with my pastor after worship, I was singled out. The Rev. Dr. George W. Wittmer asked me, a ten-year-old, to meet him at the door to the sacristy after he had greeted everyone. Tall and gray-haired, Pastor Wittmer was easily the most important person our family knew. He wore impressive vestments, gave polished sermons, had more books in his study than I had ever seen in one place and had an office bigger than our family's living room. A vice president of our denomination, he presided over Messiah Lutheran Church at the corner of Grand Avenue and Pestalozzi Street in South St. Louis with refined authority.

Messiah Church was a thriving tall-steeple church in those religious boom years, and its pastor was a leader in a denomination that placed clergy on a pedestal. When I met him at the sacristy door, he invited me in to a place I had never been before. As Pastor Wittmer put away his vestments, he told me that the congregation was going to introduce the use of individual cups into its communion practice.

Like many Protestant congregations, Messiah Church was a very prim and proper place in the days before liturgical reform and social upheaval swept across much of American Christianity. Holy Communion, as it was called then, was celebrated on a monthly rhythm, and children my age were not permitted to partake.



Pastor Wittmer invited me to become the first acolyte chosen to follow him as he distributed the private cups filled with wine to the well-dressed adults kneeling at the communion rail. My job would be to collect the used glass cups on a silver tray.

Although always taking me to the brink of disaster (a dropped tray or cup), the job had perks: a special robe and the privilege of sitting with Pastor Wittmer in the sacristy during the service. In those days our congregation's clergy sat privately in the sacristy and appeared in the sanctuary only when they had something to say or do. I could assist him by timing his ser-



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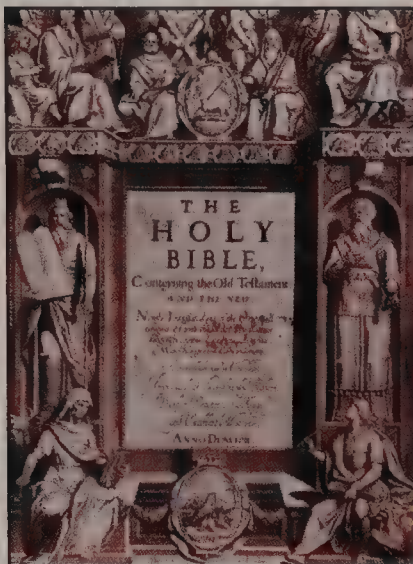


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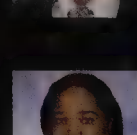


Francisco Garcia-Trato, Trinity University professor emeritus:
"Is There a King James Bible in Spanish?" (in Spanish)

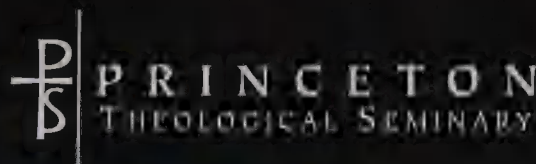


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mon (the goal was finishing within a rarely reached 23 minutes), lighting the candles and filling his water glass.

What I did not know then was that I had crossed a threshold. I had been invited inside the working world of the pastor. As I timed the sermons, collected the lipstick-smeared communion cups, arranged books, lit candles and watched my pastor do his job, I began to try on the role of pastor. A decade later Pastor Wittmer and I began to disagree about the course of Messiah Church and our denomination. But that day—with the full collusion of my parents and a large congregation of people who thought it would be great if I would be a pastor someday—he gave me the chance to try on pastoring. More than that, he led my family and congregation in creating a plausibility structure (something that is much harder to construct in our more complex times) in which I could begin to see myself as a minister.

—**James P. Wind**, president of the Alban Institute

I was raised by Irish Catholics. Even as I write that it sounds a little like “wolves” or some especially feral class of creature. I don’t mean this in the nativist sense of brutish hordes, but in the sense of sure faith and fierce family loyalties, the pack dynamics of their clannishness, their vigilance and pride. My parents were grandchildren of immigrants who had all married within their tribe.

The only moderating influence to this bloodline and gene pool was provided by my paternal grandmother, a woman of Dutch extraction, who came from a long line of Daughters of the American Revolution. She was a temperate Methodist, an Eisenhower Republican, a wonderful cook and seamstress and gardener who never gossiped or gave any scandal to her family until early in the so-called roaring twenties, when she was smitten by and betrothed to marry an Irish Catholic. This was not good news to her parents and their circle.

As was the custom of her generation, to appease her fiancé’s priest she “converted” to what she would ever after refer to as “the one true faith?”—the lilt appended to the end of the declarative shoving a foot of doubt in the door, as if the apostle with a finger in the wounds of the risen Christ had queried, “My Lord, My God?” She took a kind of dark glee in explaining the conversion experience to her grandchildren, to wit: “Ah, the priest splashed a little water on me and said, ‘Geraldine, you were born a Methodist, raised a Methodist. Thanks be to God, now you’re Catholic.’”

Some weeks after the nuptials, she was out in the backyard, grilling sirloins

for my grandfather on the first Friday in Lent when one of the brother knights from the Knights of Columbus leapt over the back fence to upbraid her for the smell of beef rising over a Catholic household during the holy season. She listened, nodded and smiled, walked over to the garden hose, splashed water on the grill and professed, “You were born cows, raised cows. Thanks be to God, now you are fish.” She then sent the nosy neighbor on his way.


“Surely, we are all God’s children,” she would append to her narrative, “the same but different.”

My grandmother’s telling of this filled me with doubts and wonders, which seem these years since like elements of faith. And I was smitten at the power of language, which could, in a twinkling, turn cows into fish. It made me hunger for such “author-ity.” And made me less of a Catholic, I suppose—variously devout and devoutly lapsed, and yet more catholic somehow, in the way Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the first century and John XXIII wrote in the last: a sense that we are all fellow pilgrims in search of a way home.

For all her efforts at temperance, my grandmother became, like many converts, as crazed as the unruly crowd she’d married into—for whom everything had meaning beyond the obvious and life was the slow unfolding of metaphors and mysteries the cipher for which lay just beyond our reach.

—**Thomas Lynch**, who recently wrote *Apparition & Late Fictions and Walking Papers*

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My father's butcher shop

by Eugene H. Peterson

MY FATHER WAS a butcher. His meat market, within walking distance of our home, was just off of Main Street in Kalispell, our small Montana town. By the time I was five years old, I was permitted to walk by myself the five or six blocks from home to his market and work for him. Work at that time of my life consisted of accompanying him across the street to the Silver Star Café. He would have a cup of coffee with the cook, Phil, and take down the order for the next day's supply of hamburger, steaks, pork chops, sausage and liver. The waitress always brought me a donut and a glass of milk.

My father wore a white butcher's apron, even when he went across the street to the café. I wore one too. My mother made it out of flour sacks, identical to my father's except for its size. She made me a new apron every year to match my growth. When I put on my apron in the butcher shop, I entered the adult world. And sitting on the counter stool in the café, being served alongside my father, was confirmation.

By this time I knew the story of the boy Samuel who had been "lent to the Lord" by his parents to live and work in the temple at Shiloh with Eli the priest. His parents, Elkanah and Hannah, visited him at Shiloh every year. His mother made him a priest's robe to wear, an ephod, as he assisted Eli. Every year as he added inches to his height, she would make him a new robe to fit his newly acquired stature. I knew exactly what that robe, that ephod, looked like—didn't I wear it every time I worked with my father? Didn't I get a new one every time I had grown another inch or two? I might have been the only person in our town who knew what an ephod actually looked like.

Shiloh couldn't have been that much different from my father's meat market. The three-year-old bull that was slaughtered at Samuel's dedication at Shiloh would become the hamburgers and sirloin steaks at my father's market and provided continuity between the shrine and the meat market.

I had no idea, of course, that I was acquiring a biblical imagination, finding myself in the biblical story, identifying myself as a priest.

As years went on, I graduated from the "work" of putting away the donut and milk that accompanied a business transaction to the beginner's work of grinding hamburger and slicing liver. One of Dad's butchers would pick me up and stand me on an upended orange crate before the big, red Hobart meat grinder, and I in my linen ephod would push chunks of beef

into its maw. The day I was trusted with a knife and taught to respect it and keep it sharp, I knew adulthood was just around the corner. I was started out on liver (it's hard to mess up when slicing liver), but in a few years I was participating in the entire range of meat-cutting operations.

"That knife has a will of its own," old Eddie Nordcrist, one of my dad's butchers, used to say to me. "Get to know your knife." If I cut myself, he would blame me not for carelessness but for ignorance—I didn't "know" my knife.

I also learned that a beef carcass has a will of its own—it is not just an inert mass of meat and gristle and bone but has character and joints, texture and grain. Carving a quarter of

**By example, I internalized
a respect for the material
at hand.**

beef into roasts and steaks was not a matter of imposing my knife-fortified will on dumb matter but respectfully and reverently entering into the reality of the material.

Hackers was my father's contemptuous label for butchers who ignorantly imposed their will on the meat. They didn't take into account the subtle differences between pork and beef. They used knives and cleavers inappropriately and didn't keep them sharp. They were bullies forcing their will on slabs of bacon and hindquarters of beef. The results were unattractive and uneconomical. They commonly left behind a mess that the rest of us had to clean up.

Not so much by words but by example, I internalized a respect for the material at hand. The material could be a pork loin, or a mahogany plank, or a lump of clay, or the will of God, or a soul, but when the work is done well, there is a kind of submission of will to the conditions at hand, a cul-

*Eugene H. Peterson is the author of *The Message* and professor emeritus of spiritual theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. This article is excerpted from his book *The Pastor: A Memoir*. Reprinted by permission of HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins. © Eugene H. Peterson.*

tivation of what I would later learn to call humility. It is a noticeable feature in all skilled workers—woodworkers, potters, poets, pray-ers and pastors. I learned it in the butcher shop.

Years later I came upon the phrase *negative capability* and recognized that it was something very much like submission to the material, the humility, that I had had so much practice in on the butcher block. The poet John Keats coined the term to refer to this quality in the worker. He was impressed by William Shakespeare's work in creating such a variety of characters in his plays, none of which seemed to be a projection of Shakespeare's ego. Each had an independent life of his or her own. Keats wrote, "A poet has no identity . . . he is continually . . . filling some other Body." He believed that the only way that real creative will matured was in a person who was not hell-bent on imposing his or her will on another person or thing but "was capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact and reason." Interesting: Shakespeare, the poet from whom we know the most about other people, is the poet about whom we know next to nothing.

All the while my imagination kept working on the priest theme with the slaughter of bulls and heifers, goats and sheep. We didn't offer turtledoves, but we made up for it with turkeys. All our sacrificed animals, cut up and wrapped and paid for, would be prayed over (I assumed that everybody prayed over meals), then consumed in our customers' homes.

Ours was a mostly storytelling church, but one year we had a pastor who specialized in the tabernacle, the temple and the whole Hebrew sacrificial system. He took on the book of Leviticus as his text and preached three months of sermons on it. I was immediately interested. I was an insider to exactly this sort of world: I grew up experiencing the sights and sounds of animals killed and offered up. I had spent a lot of time by now in our local slaughterhouse and often helped with the slaughter.

But after a couple Sundays of Leviticus I lost interest in what our pastor was up to. This man knew nothing about killing animals. And though we never butchered goats, the rich sensuality of Hebrew worship was reproduced daily in our workplace. It never occurred to me that the world of worship was tidy and sedate. Our pastor had it all figured out on paper, but I knew it wasn't like that at all. I couldn't help but wonder how much he knew about sin and forgiveness. He certainly knew nothing about animal sacrifices. Sacrifice was messy: blood sloshing on the floor, gutting the creatures and gathering up the entrails in buckets, skinning the animals, salting down the hides. And in the summertime, the flies—flies everywhere.

My father had four meatcutters working for him. My favorite was Herb Thiel. He had a flat, expressionless face disfigured by a bad eye, milky and sunken. He didn't wear an eye patch. His face looked like a tombstone, with that dead eye engraved on it, so everyone called him Tombstone. Mostly we got the meat we sold in our market from the local slaughterhouse, but occasionally we would buy directly from a farmer in the valley. When we did that, Tombstone would go to the farm, kill the heifer or pig,



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dress it out and bring it back to our shop. The other meat cutters sometimes called him the Killer. I loved to go out with him on those jobs. He never talked. But I didn't mind that—there was something rakish about being in the company of a man sometimes called Tombstone and other times the Killer.

On one of these occasions we were out to get a yearling calf. When we arrived, the calf was already confined to a loading chute to facilitate our work. The farmer had a large family. When we got out of the truck, the children were all over us, begging Tombstone not to kill the animal. It was a 4-H calf and had become a pet of the farm kids. Some of the kids were crying. All of them were upset. Emotional anarchy. In a low voice Tombstone said to me, "I'll fix 'em." He took his Remington .22 and shot the calf between the eyes. As it slumped to the ground, Tombstone took his knife from its scabbard and slit the calf's throat to bleed it. As the blood poured from the cut, Tombstone knelt down, let the blood run into his cupped hands and pretended to drink it, the blood dripping from that flat, one-eyed face. The kids ran in horror to the farmhouse 50 feet away. We could see them watching us from between the curtains. We completed our work without interference. Tombstone wiped the blood from his mouth and chin, and we returned to the butcher shop.

That butcher shop was my introduction to the world of congregation, which in a few years would be my workplace as a pastor. The people who came into our shop were not just customers. Something else defined them. It always seemed more like a congregation than a store. My father in his priestly robe greeted each person by name and knew many of their stories. And many of them knew me, in my priest's robe, by name. I always knew there was more going on than a commercial transaction. My father had an easy smile and was always gracious, especially with the occasional disagreeable ones: Alicia Conrad, who was always fussy about the leanness of the bacon; Gus Anderson, who made my dad trim off any excess fat from a steak before weighing it. Everyone felt welcome. He gave people dignity by the tone and manner of his greetings.

Two blocks away on a side street there was a brothel. There was always a good bit of talk on the street about the whores and the cathouse and the red-light district that was a blight on the street. But not in our place: when these women entered our premises, they were treated with the dignity of their Christian names. I remember three of them: Mary, Grace, Veronica. When they left with their purchases, there was no gossipy moralism trailing in their wake. They were in a safe place. Sometimes the women would telephone their order and ask for a delivery. I was always the delivery boy. When I brought the packages, they always knew my name and treated me the way they themselves had been treated in the butcher shop, not as a customer—which I would guess is how most of the people who came up the stairs to their rooms were treated—but as a named person.

Oddly, the one person who seemed out of place in our market was a pastor we had for a couple of years. He wasn't a regular customer, but when an evangelist or missionary would come to town, that pastor always paid us a call. He would get my father off to the side, put his arm across his shoulders and say in the same "spiritual" voice that he always used when he prayed, "Brother Don, the Lord has laid it on my heart that this poor servant of God hasn't been eating all that well lately and would be greatly blessed with one of your fine steaks." My dad, ever generous, always gave him two. I never heard my father complain, but I could see the other meatcutters wink and

exchange knowing looks, and I was embarrassed for my pastor who seemed so out of place in this holy place of work.

I am quite sure now that the way I as a pastor came to understand congregation had its beginnings in the "congregational" atmosphere of our butcher shop. Congregation is composed of people who, upon entering a church, leave behind what people on the street name or call them. A church can never be reduced to a place where goods and services are exchanged. It must never be a place where a person is labeled. It can never be a place where gossip is perpetuated. Before

I worked out of fear of failing—something that, with difficulty, I had to unlearn.

anything else, it is a place where a person is named and greeted, whether implicitly or explicitly, in Jesus' name. A place where dignity is conferred.

I first learned that under my father's priesthood in his butcher shop.

I had learned much in my father's butcher shop that gave

bone and muscle to my pastoral identity. I also learned something about work that could have destroyed it, something that I had to unlearn, with considerable difficulty as it turned out, 20 years later. It had to do with work, out-of-control work, work as a kind of painkiller which could well have caused a malignant cancer.

The focal point of the unlearning was Saturday, the climax of our work week. The unlearning happened like this.

When I was 30 years old, I was assigned the task of developing a new congregation in Maryland. I was still in the early days of having acquired a pastoral identity. But I was full of anticipation, energized by the challenge of working out my pastoral salvation in fear and trembling with a new congregation. I had never done this before. I was learning on the job, but I felt honored to be entrusted with the task. In those first months as I realized how daunting was the work that faced my wife, Jan, and me, the adrenaline receded and the fear and trembling that Paul had recommended when dealing with a holy God and a holy salvation was replaced by a very unholy anxiety. I anesthetized the anxiety with work, long hours of it. I worked out of



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fear of failing. I worked when there was no work to do, worked even harder when there was no work to do. Spinning my wheels. Grinding my gears.

After a couple years of this, I knew the work wasn't working. One day, in a kind of prayerful reverie, wondering how I had gotten off on the wrong foot so badly, I remembered Prettyfeather, and as I remembered, the details of what I knew of her arranged themselves into a story.

Remembering Prettyfeather started a process of unlearning a way of working that destroys life. This story became the text by which I unlearned what I had learned only too well in those formative years in the butcher shop. Here's the story.

Prettyfeather placed two buffalo-head nickels on the countertop for her Holy Saturday purchase: smoked ham hocks, two for a nickel. In the descending hierarchy of Holy Saturday foods, ham hocks were at the bottom.

Large hickory-smoked hams held center position in the displays in my father's butcher shop. Colorful cardboard cutouts provided by salesmen from the meat-packing companies of Armour, Hormel and Silverbow all showed variations on a theme: a father at an Easter Sunday dinner table carving a ham, surrounded by an approving wife and expectant children.

Off to the side of these displays were stacks of the smaller and cheaper "picnic" hams (a picnic ham is not, properly speaking, a ham at all, but the shoulder of the pig). There were no company-supplied pictures or even brand names on them. On Holy Saturday, customers crowded into our store, responding to the sale signs painted on the plateglass windows fronting the street and sorting themselves into upper and lower socioeconomic strata: the affluent bought honey-cured, hickory-smoked hams; the less-than-affluent bought unadjectived "picnics."

Prettyfeather was the only person I ever remember who bought ham hocks—gristly on the inside and leathery on the outside, but smoked and therefore emanating the aroma of a feast—on Holy Saturday. She was the only Indian I knew by name, although I grew up in Indian country. Every Saturday she came into our store to make a small purchase: pickled pig's feet, chitlins, blood sausage, headcheese, pork liver.

She was always by herself. She wore moccasins and was wrapped in a blanket, even in the warmest weather. The coins she used for her purchases were in a leather pouch that hung like a goiter at her neck. Her face was the color and texture of the moccasins on her feet.

Indian was a near-mythological word for me, full of nobility and filled with stories of the hunt and sacred ceremony.

Somehow it never occurred to me that this Indian squaw who came into our store every Saturday and bought barely edible meats belonged to that nobility.

While she made her purchases from us and did whatever other shopping she did on these Saturdays in town, her husband and seven or eight other Indian braves sat on apple boxes in the alley behind the Pastime Bar and passed around a jug of Thunderbird wine. Several jugs, actually. As I made my back-door deliveries of steaks and hamburger to the restaurants along Main Street, I passed up and down the alley several times each Saturday and watched the empty jugs accumulate. Late in the evening, Bennie Odegard, son of one of the bar owners and a little older than I, would pull the braves into his dad's pickup truck and drive them out south of town to their encampment along the Stillwater River and dump them out.

I don't know how Prettyfeather got back to that small cluster of tar-paper shacks and tepees. She walked, I guess. Carrying her small purchases. On Holy Saturday she carried four ham hocks.

I had never heard of any Saturday designated as holy. It was simply Saturday. If, once a year, precision was required, Holy Saturday was "the Saturday before Easter." It was one of the heaviest workdays of the year. Beginning early in the morning, I carried the great, fragrant hams shipped from Armour in Spokane, Hormel in Missoula and Silverbow in Butte and arranged them symmetrically in pyramids.

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I grew up in a religious home that believed devoutly in the saving benefits of the death of Jesus and the glorious life of resurrection. But between these two polar events of the faith, we worked a long and lucrative day. Holiness was put on hold till Sunday. Saturday was for working hard and making money. It was a day when the evidence of hard work and its consequence—money—became publicly apparent. The evidence was especially clear on that particular Saturday, when we sold hundreds of hams to deserving Christians—and four ham hocks to an Indian squaw and her pickup load of drunks.

I would have been very surprised, and somewhat unbelieving, to have known that in the very town in which I worked furiously all those unholy Saturdays, there were people besides the Indians who were not working at all, not spending, but remembering the despair of a world disappointed in its grandest hopes, entering into the emptiness of death by deliberately emptying the self of illusion and indulgence and self-importance. Keeping vigil for Easter. Waiting for the dawn.

And some of them listening to this ancient Holy Saturday sermon from a preacher now unknown:

Something strange is happening on earth today—a great silence, and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear. He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captive Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him, Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: “My Lord be with you all.” Christ answered him: “And

with your spirit.” He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying “Awake, O sleeper and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” (The reading for Holy Saturday in *The Liturgy of the Hours*)

As it turned out, I interpreted the meaning of the world and the people around me far more in terms of the hard working on Saturday than anything said or sung on Friday and Sunday. Whatever was told me in those years (and I have no doubt that

The Indians’ despair was much like Holy Saturday despair.


I heard truth), what I absorbed in my bones was a liturgical rhythm in which the week reached its climax in a human work-day, the results of which were enjoyed on Sunday, and especially on Easter Sunday. Those assumptions provided the grid for a social interpretation of the world around me: Saturday was the day for hard work, or for displaying its results—namely, money. If someone appeared neither working nor spending on Saturday, there was something wrong, catastrophically wrong. The Indians attempting a hungover Easter feast on ham hocks were the most prominent example of something wrong.


It was a view of life shaped by “the Gospel according to America.” The rewards were obvious, and I enjoyed them. Hard work pays off. I learned much in those years in my father’s butcher shop, yet there was one large omission that set all other truth dangerously at risk: the omission of holy rest. The refusal to be silent. The obsessive avoidance of emptiness.

It was far more than ignorance on Holy Saturday; it was weekly arrogance. Not only was the Good Friday crucifixion bridged to the Easter resurrection by this day furious with energy and lucrative with reward, but all the gospel truths were likewise set as either introductions or conclusions to the human action that displayed our prowess and our virtue every week of the year. God was background to our business. Every gospel truth was maintained intact and all the human energy was wholly admirable, but the rhythms were off. Desolation—and with it companionship with the desolate, ranging from first-century Semites to 20th-century Indians—was all but wiped from consciousness.

As the story formed in my prayer, this most poignant irony became embedded in my memory: those seven or eight Indians, with the Thunderbird empties lying around drunk in the alley behind the

Pastime Bar on Saturday afternoon, while we Scandinavian Christians worked diligently late into the night, oblivious to the holiness of the day. The Indians were in despair, religious despair, something very much like the Holy Saturday despair narrated in the Gospels. Their way of life had come to nothing, the only buffalo left to them was engraved on nickels, a couple of which one of their squaws had paid out that morning for four bony ham hocks. The early sacredness of their lives was a wasteland; and they, godforsaken as they supposed, drugged their despair with Thunderbird and buried their dead visions and dreams in the alley behind the Pastime, ignorant of the God at work beneath their emptiness.

People talk about steep learning curves. I was embarked on a steep unlearning curve. It didn’t happen overnight, but it happened. Prettyfeather gave me the story that provided a text for the extensive unlearning before me, the unlearning that was necessary to clear the ground for learning that God at work—not I—was the center of the way I was going to be living for the rest of my life. Inappropriate, anxiety-driven, fear-driven work would only interfere with and distract from what God was already doing. My “work” assignment was to pay more attention to what God does than what I do and then to find, and guide others to find, the daily, weekly, yearly rhythms that would get this awareness into our bones. Holy Saturday for a start. And then Sabbath-keeping. Staying in touch with people in despair, knowing them by name and waiting for resurrection. 



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Growing Christians

by Frank G. Honeycutt

I DID MY clinical pastoral education at the Central Correctional Institution on the banks of the Congaree River, which flows through the city of Columbia, South Carolina. The old dungeonlike facility has since been torn down and an upscale housing development is emerging in its place. At CCI, I met a guy named Pee Wee Gaskins. Great guy on the surface; also a notorious serial killer. Pee Wee asked for communion just before I left the prison that summer to return to seminary. A couple of months later he was linked to (and eventually executed for) an in-house radio bomb that killed a fellow inmate. I've often wondered whether Pee Wee asked for communion as some sort of precrime absolution for what he was hatching. Sometimes Christians think conversion is only for flamboyant and notorious sinners like Pee Wee.

Conversion is always a lifelong process. It is never finished for any of us. "For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up in life" (2 Cor. 5:4). Six weeks of instruction in an inquirers' class and a handshake into church membership isn't going to foil the Father of Lies. It never has. "The number of people who claim to have been Christians for years but who lack spiritual depth and maturity is reason for alarm," writes Gordon T. Smith. "Consider the possibility that at least part of the root of this problem is a weak understanding of Christian conversion."

In his excellent book *Beginning Well*, Smith suggests that renewal will not occur in churches until pastors and parishioners embrace three specific things: 1) a "clear goal" that moves the justified sinner from acceptance and forgiveness in Christ to growth in holiness (sanctification); 2) a "good beginning" in which a local congregation expects and looks out for people who are turning to Jesus, assisting new converts in this turning and helping them become conversant in the vocabulary of conversion; and 3) an "intentional program of spiritual formation" in which newcomers are invited to grow in faith alongside other converts and seasoned church members.

"Many Christians," says Smith, "have anemic spiritual lives with little freedom, little growth in grace and little commitment to obedience and service. I propose that an appropriate response to this predicament includes facing up to the fact that the church has a weak notion of conversion."

I don't know about your denomination, but this describes the current Lutheran predicament in spades. In the name of grace, we justify just about any behavior or lack of spiritual dis-

cipline. Many Lutheran clergy, seeking to avoid the horrid sin of seeming judgmental, slowly begin to resemble Pastor Misty Naylor in Garrison Keillor's novel *Pontoon*: "She used to be Presbyterian but she had a near-death experience during breast enhancement surgery and a door opened onto a garden full of golden light and beautiful plants and every different sort of person, Muslim and Hindu and Buddhist and Jew, all rejoicing and living in harmony, and when Misty returned to life, she dedicated herself to world peace and to Momentism—you know, the idea that all of time takes place in one moment, there is no eternity."

Bending over backward to avoid judgment in the name of grace, Lutherans sometimes fall into the world's great religious

I can see the question in the eyes of those considering the program: "You want me to do all that?"

salad bar and form "theology amalgamated"—a little of this, a little of that, and nothing really in particular. Because they want to avoid legalism, it's hard for many Lutherans to get theologically specific anymore: "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:3–5).

I can see it in their eyes. It's orientation night for those who are considering our church's catechumenal process. *You want me to do all that?*

Five people eventually sign on for the eight-month process. Those who don't have the time or inclination are invited back

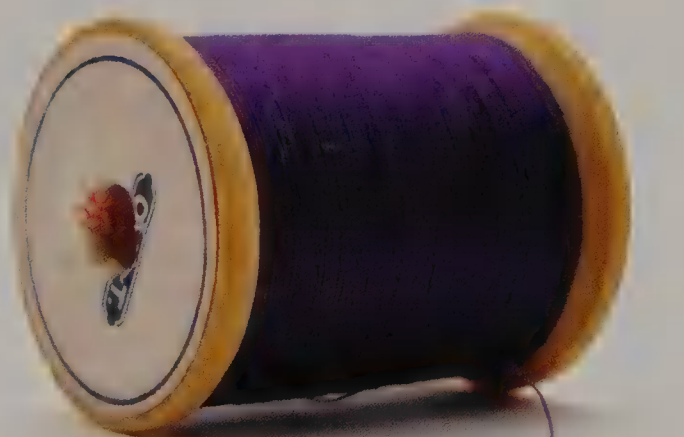
Frank G. Honeycutt is pastor of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina. This article is adapted from his book *The Truth Shall Make You Odd*, just published by Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group. © 2011 by Brazos. Used by permission.

the following year, and I encourage them to experience the many short-term opportunities we have on Sunday mornings and throughout the week.

On a Monday evening the five recruits gather with me in my office for the first of our weekly 90-minute meetings which will occur over the church year. We're quite a varied bunch, and as the catechist I always wonder at this point whether we'll ever gel and make it through the first month. It's also apparent that we bring our histories and hurts with us. James reminds the early church, "Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). From the first meeting, it's clear that we've all endured a lot. However, I'm not sure that the group considers it all joy at this point. Let's look at them one by one.

Emerson grew up in a strict religious tradition that required a nightly recitation of each and every sin for that day. He left the church after discovering that what he'd been taught did not square with the facts of the church's origins. "I was so angry that I'd been bamboozled, and I was determined to never, ever be fooled again when it comes to religious belief." After getting married and having children of his own, Emerson recently found his way back to church but admits that "distrust of religious authority sometimes gets in the way."

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Cleo, daughter of a pastor, is a lesbian and a longtime Christian. "About seventh grade, I started to resent the church because, despite our differences and his propensity for angry discipline, I really missed my father. He worked all the time. The church had stolen my daddy." Cleo is recovering from a breakup with her longtime partner and is seeking new employment.

Mary, a health professional, tentatively plans to be baptized at the Easter Vigil but wants to take time to learn more. She grew up with no church tradition at all. "I can remember my friends asking me what religion I was and being mortified that we were 'nothing.' When I asked my parents why we didn't go to church, my mom would blame it on the fact that we moved around so much, and at the time that seemed like a good answer. I remember our first cross-country meet when our coach led us in the Lord's Prayer before the race. Thank goodness that people look down when they pray because I knew only a few of the words."

Race manages his own business and has been a member of our congregation for about ten years. "As long as I can remember I have sensed the presence of God. At church I often felt this presence. But I have felt most spiritual in nature. At an early age I became fascinated with plants. I actually did not mind doing yard work and gardening." Race seeks a deeper discipleship through this group.

Sally has taught special education in public schools for many years; she's been a Lutheran since her marriage. "During

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my worst depressions I had one friend who called me often and would not let me push her away. She showed me a theology of love and never used dogma or absolutes." Naturally inquisitive and skeptical, Sally comes to group life with "lots of questions" about God and the Bible. She is particularly interested in learning more about how to share her faith with others without sounding judgmental.

After an opening prayer, we begin.

You go out into deep waters to save, and you do so because you love. But the assumption that you are perched above the water and that the person you're addressing is drowning prevents real empathy. You will never understand that person's mystery until you abandon the need to move her where you are, to leave her where you yourself don't want to be. Because every evangelical knows, in the end, that the act of conversion is a mystery. (Todd Shy)

The catechumenal process hearkens back to the early centuries of the church. Partly acknowledging the difficulty in converting from a pagan culture to a Christian community and partly recognizing the need (from fear of infiltration and exposure to Roman oppression) to look over converts closely before welcoming them fully, conversion to Jesus in the first few centuries of the church was usually a long and protracted process lasting up to three years. It culminated with baptism at the Great Easter Vigil.

The conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century generally lessened the rigors that a catechumen might face in preparing for baptism. The catechumenal process was recovered in the United States in the 1960s when Roman Catholics began using the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. Liturgical traditions (particularly Lutherans and Episcopalians) soon followed with their own rites and processes.

Many books describe what some call "liturgical evangelism." Processes differ from place to place. Some include only true catechumens (adults preparing for baptism), and others also include people who have been away from church life for some time and are now returning as adults. Whatever the local practice, the catechumenate generally includes four stages that lead participants to conclude, "He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13) and "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

In my 15 years of trial and error, about 75 people have gone through the process under my, or a lay catechist's, leadership. That may not seem like a lot, but one must remember that these 75 have a clear sense of their call over unhurried, percolated time. Alternately, many graduates of the new member class (the six-week course that surely has a place in church life) who have "joined" the church subsequently vanish.

The four stages of the catechumenal process go by different names, but most versions of the process roughly coincide with the stages of the church year.

Stage 1 begins with a signed agreement to meet at a particular time and place on a weekly basis. Confidentiality is stressed and revisited many times. All members of the group receive a copy of what we've agreed upon. A built-in exit possibility is included at the end of the first stage. One young man in a group I led was three months into the process before deciding that he did not want to be baptized. It was an agonizing part of group life that year to pray with Alex and say good-bye. He continued to worship with us for a while and then disappeared entirely. This is an important part of any

conversion process that seeks to speak the truth in love: there can be no coercion or arm-twisting. A disciple of Jesus must feel called and not pushed. "If any *want* to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Part of the challenge of member inactivity is that we do not engage new people on this very point—call and commitment. Commitment will not seem like a burden if the call is authentic.

The curriculum for this first stage consists of the questions brought by the members of the group. *Who created God? Why is there so much suffering in the world if God is good? How do*

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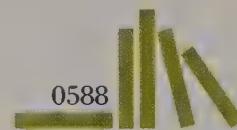
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I read the Bible and take even the strange stories seriously? Why should I be a Christian and not a Buddhist? What do Christians believe about hell and heaven? One goal of the inquiry stage is to honor the truth that God has been at work in the lives of participants well before their entrance into congregational life. So it's important to honor their questions as signs of the living God at work before church became a consideration. All questions are arranged by topic, typed and distributed to group members early in this first stage.

It is very important to take all questions seriously. One of the catechist's primary requirements early on is transparency.

No question is out of bounds. I like to recall that the first words out of Jesus' mouth in the Gospel of John come in the form of a question: "What are you looking for?" (1:38). Reading assignments (short articles dealing with specific questions) may be part of this first stage, but conversation, testimony and honest exchange color most of our time together between early October and the beginning of Advent.

Inquiry, of course, never really ends for any of us. But toward the end of this first stage, participants engage in a weeklong period of discernment to decide whether they want to move on to the next stage. By this time, most decide to continue. Others who may not have the time or theological inclination are blessed by the group without judgment. Church staff should always follow up with those who decide not to continue and invite them into other areas of involvement in church life. Those who choose to continue mark this decision with a public rite at a Sunday morning service. The central question posed in that rite is the same question posed by Jesus in John 1:38: "What are you looking for?" or "What do you seek?" Participants may answer, "Life in Christ," or they may answer with words of their own.

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Stage 2 roughly coincides with the period from the beginning of Advent through the end of Epiphany. In this time the group wrestles collectively (and individually) with important questions shaped by the church year: *What is waiting to be born in me? What gifts (with the magi) might I be able to offer Jesus?*

Two central activities take up the lion's share of this stage—sharing spiritual autobiographies and studying one of the lectionary lessons for the coming Sunday. All five of the participants named above chose to continue in the process. I (or the lay catechist) always go first in sharing an autobiography that describes God's presence (or seeming absence) in childhood, adolescence, young adulthood and current experience. At this point, the importance of confidentiality must be stressed once again. In their writing, many are revisiting old wounds for the first time in years. It is especially important to remind the group that all of us are serving not as therapists but rather as colleagues on a theological quest for meaning and truth.

Bible study in this stage is characterized by the simple yet profound method

of *lectio divina*—a slow rereading of one of the lectionary texts for the coming Sunday. This serves as excellent preparation for worship and helps participants begin to see their stories in the overarching metanarrative that is the Bible. Stage 2 concludes with another public rite, so that other parishioners continue to be aware of the group's existence, support it with prayer and consider their own participation in a future year.

Stage 3 coincides with Lent and the services of Holy Week. The central questions of this stage are: *What is dying within me to make room for something else? What am I leaving behind?*

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By this point in our life together, the group participants are helping me formulate sermons. Holy Week is an especially rich and meaningful time. We prepare for Mary's baptism (with her young daughter) at the Easter Vigil with anticipation and joy. Cleo twitters that the idea of washing feet on Maundy Thursday at the noon service gives her "the heebie-jeebies." I try to explain some of the drama of the Triduum, but not too much. The stripping of the altar as the shadows lengthen, the reading of John's passion narrative on that famous Friday, and the mystery of fire, water and Word at the Vigil all carry powerful metaphors that cannot be described fully beforehand. Experiencing the fullness of Lent and Holy Week together is always powerful and moving: "Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

Stage 4 (coinciding with the 50 days of Easter) is also called mystagogy in many catechumenal process variations. During this stage, we reflect on the sacramental mysteries of Holy Communion and baptism. We also use a gift-discernment process and focus on a final question: *How is Christ alive inside me after I have died with him in baptism?* "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

By this time, after months of weekly meetings, the members of the group know one another quite well and can take some risks, stating the unique spiritual gifts that each participant brings to the body. Race has a gift and love for yard work and plans to use his time sacrificially to beautify the church grounds. Mary senses that her gift as a newly baptized person is in the ministry of accompaniment for other unbaptized adults who are joining us for worship on Sundays. We all sense a great need for retreat ministry, and Sally shares her history of experiencing the Spirit's power in settings away from an urban pace. She expresses a desire to start a regular retreat ministry in our congregation.

Emerson thinks hard theologically, and we all agree that he's being called by God to teach adults and maybe serve as a lay catechist. Cleo feels a tug to reach out in Christ's name to other gay and lesbian people who feel estranged from Christ's church.

On the day of Pentecost, the group stands before the congregation and announces a specific call to ministry. Others in the congregation are invited to gather around this call and begin a new (or support an existing) ministry. The Holy Spirit descends anew. Scales fall from our eyes. The church is renewed and strengthened through the gift of call and conversion. CC

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Twain's sorrows

by Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

BY THE TIME MARK TWAIN died in 1910 his celebrity exceeded that of presidents and kings. His works had been published on both sides of the Atlantic and widely translated. They were also pirated by Canadian publishers—an act of literary theft that moved Twain to appear personally before a congressional committee to lobby for more stringent laws to protect intellectual property. He had made and lost a fortune and enjoyed long friendships with some of the nation's most influential intellectuals and businesspeople. Among those were both William Dean Howells, “dean of American letters,” and Henry Rogers, infamous head of Standard Oil. A simple list of the friends he delighted and enjoyed over the decades of his variegated career would provide ample testimony to the capacious reach of his tastes, ambitions and tolerance.

Twain's large appetites were matched by the restless energy that took him across the country several times and back and forth to Europe many more times, to places where he divided his time between lecture halls and billiard parlors. One of his proudest achievements was the honorary doctorate of letters he received in 1907 from Oxford University, a consummation he greeted with the comment, “For 20 years I have been diligently trying to improve my own literature, and now, by virtue of the University of Oxford, I mean to doctor everybody else's.” But his deepest joy came from a long, happy marriage to his beloved (and long-suffering) Livy, whose death six years before his own, along with the deaths of two of his three daughters, left him bereft.

Numerous biographers have relied heavily for their understanding of Twain's final years on his autobiography and the authorized 1912 three-volume biography by his friend Albert Bigelow Paine, both of which offer evidence of growing bitterness, cynicism and disillusionment with church, state and social hypocrisies. But a rereading of the compendious record of those years, including over 5,000 letters that have been available at the University of California–Berkeley since 1966, modify this picture. In fact, as Michael Sheldon shows, Twain's characteristic humor, his tenderness toward others' children and grandchildren, his lively interest in public affairs and scientific discovery, and his wide hospitality survived the harsh disappointments and losses that afflicted him in his final years.

Sheldon's *Mark Twain: Man in White* offers not only the satisfaction of a generous reconsideration of Twain's complicated personality and unsettling genius, but also the pleasure of well-told anecdotes liberally punctuated by Twain's own inimitable

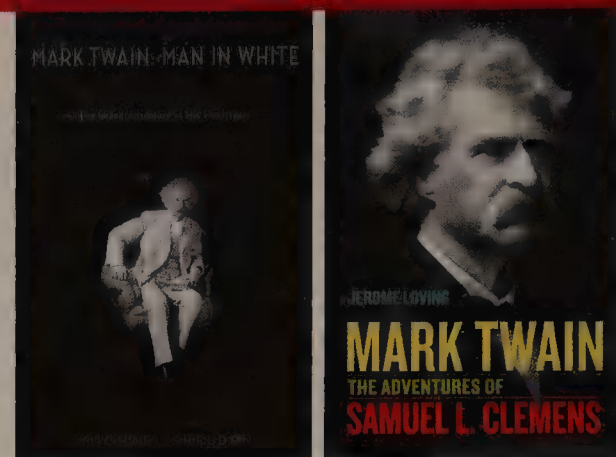
words on life, writing, faith, friendship, falsehood and, with increasing urgency, social justice and public policy. Sheldon insists on the need to correct the popular image of an embittered misanthrope that has been attached to the aging author. “In our modern eagerness to highlight his darker side,” he writes, “we do him a disservice by pretending that his matchless sense of humor suddenly failed him in his last years.” And indeed, the liberal excerpts from his letters and late works sug-

Twain pursued faith questions with persistence and with some harsh judgments.

gest a mind still lively and clear and an unabating, albeit more acerbic, wit.

The volume's title introduces what Sheldon sees as a defining image of Twain in later life: the white suit—shockingly out of season and slightly exhibitionistic—that he wore so frequently on public occasions that it became a trademark. Indeed, on at least one occasion an audience vociferously complained when he appeared in more conventional gray. He eventually had his London tailor make six identical white suits to provide for more frequent use.

The opening story in this copiously researched collection is an account of his appearance before the congressional committee on patents to argue for revised copyright law—the occasion on which he unveiled the white suit. The gesture was strategic: the attention he attracted and the good humor he elicited soft-



Mark Twain: Man in White: The Grand Adventure of His Final Years

By Michael Sheldon
Random House, 528 pp., \$30.00

Mark Twain: The Adventures of Samuel L. Clemens

By Jerome Loving
University of California Press, 520 pp., \$34.95

ened the tone of the debate and seems to have contributed significantly to approval of several provisions he supported.

Twain had no particular compunction about using his celebrity to advantage. "He wasn't ashamed to seek attention," Sheldon writes. As Twain himself explained, "The desire for fame is only the desire to be continuously conspicuous and attract attention and be talked about." He succeeded on all counts.

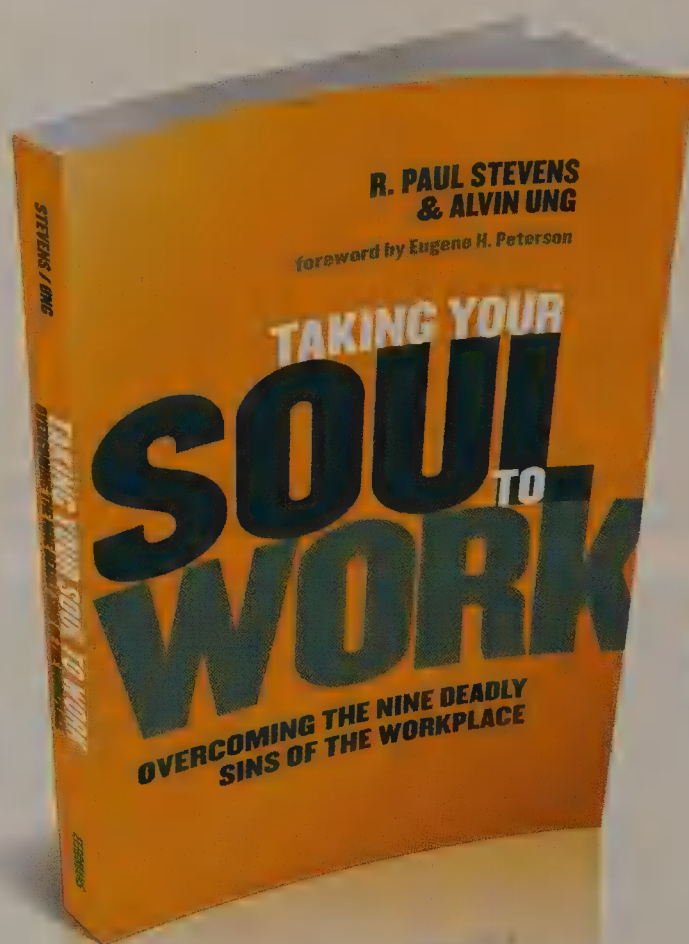
That success required ongoing attention to the public that had made him a superstar and to the image he chose and crafted as deliberately as he chose what became one of the most famous pseudonyms in history. Sheldon suggests that he even strategized about maintaining his public presence for decades after his own death by "piling up manuscripts to be published only after he was gone." Twain explained that "he wanted to entertain posterity by leaving to his heirs the job of issuing new works every decade or so. These were meant to go off like time bombs, each intended to cause a periodic ruckus, keeping his name in the news and his fame alive."

The fame came at a high cost. Twain wearied of lecture tours and struggled with guilt and regret over having been absent when his beloved daughter Susy died of meningitis, and later when another daughter, Jean, died of an epileptic attack. In his final years, the public seemed to want Twain himself more than his books. "His image was so familiar," Sheldon reports, "that it was regularly featured in advertising for everything from cigars to kitchen stoves." As William Dean Howells put it, "His literature grew less and less and his life more and more."

Twain wouldn't necessarily have resented such a characterization; he was as much a "consummate showman" as a writer, and he reveled not only in attention but also in encounter and in the conversations that provided opportunities for his ready wit to have its happy effect. Some of those conversations were about literature: he took a lively, sometimes pugnacious interest in the debates over the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, siding with those who believed that the Bard was not the author. Some were about God. Over the years he periodically made efforts to retrieve a vestige of the faith that wore thin early in his life after he took in the consistent hypo-

crisies of "respectable" people. He never reclaimed his faith, but even *Letters from the Earth*, the book in which his sharpest barbs are aimed at religion, reveals in its dark way a longing for a form of faith that would not so conspicuously undermine its own claims, and for an answer to the tormenting question of theodicy.

Some of his conversations were about astronomy, especially with respect to predictions about the return of Halley's Comet. Having been born in 1835, when the comet came within visible range, Twain predicted—rightly—that he would "go out" with it as well. More urgently, in person and in print, he



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took up the issue of American imperialism and the exploitation of laboring people. Though he never completely shed some of the prejudices of his Southern Presbyterian youth, he spoke out fervently against class bigotry and economic enslavement where he recognized its effects—and, famously, against war in the 1905 “War Prayer.”

Though Twain is perhaps best remembered for his celebration of rural boyhood, his personal enthusiasms tended toward invention. He took a personal interest in the development of color photography, or the “autochrome” process, and invited one of its pioneers to his home for dinner and billiards. Hearing a demonstration of the newly unveiled Telharmonium, which transmitted music over telephone wires, he remarked, “Every time I see or hear a new wonder like this I have to postpone my death right off. I couldn’t possibly leave the world until I have heard this again and again.” Even the severe financial loss he took on the infamous and cumbersome Paige linotype machine didn’t squelch his tendency to invest time, interest and, sadly, money in unproven technological novelties.

Twain invested in the next generation in other ways as well. Having no grandchildren of his own (though his daughter Clara was pregnant at the time he died), he gathered daughters and granddaughters of friends and admirers into a club he called his “angelfish.” He told them stories, taught them to play cards, held

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AN ENGAGEMENT WITH N. T. WRIGHT

JESUS, PAUL AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

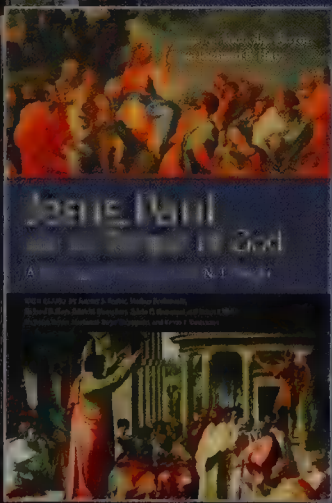
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musical evenings and took them on excursions. His interest was both grandfatherly and boyish; his own impulse to play directed him toward the young even in his final months.

Those months were full of pain. The death of several close friends and of his daughter Jean, increasing distance from his surviving daughter, burglary of his house, betrayal by two trusted household servants, copyright infringement and a deepening catarrh from years of heavy smoking prevented him from fully enjoying his celebrity and privilege. Sheldon's point, however, is that he rose to meet that pain with a remarkable resilience that is evident even in some of his more caustic assessments of what he often called "the damned human race." Sheldon offers not only thoughtful, provocative glimpses of that spirit but a reminder that the art of biography can be generous without succumbing to sentimentality and can teach compassion in the way it frames and sometimes withholds the retrospective judgments

The costs of Twain's life are detailed on a wider chronological canvas in Jerome Loving's *Mark Twain*. In its prologue he quotes Bernard De Voto's observation that "in Mark Twain's humor, disenchantment, the acknowledgment of defeat, the realization of futility find a mature expression. He laughs and, for the first time, American literature possesses a tragic laughter." Whether Twain would describe his own life as tragic is debatable, but the long inventory of losses in this biography traces a landscape where sorrows loom like strewn boulders, giving the story its distinctive topography.

In addition to the losses of his wife, daughters and friends in later life, the early death of his father and two young siblings and, even more significantly for him, his brother Henry's violent death at 20 in a steamboat explosion, left him with

grief and self-imposed guilt to which he alluded often enough to suggest that they continued to haunt him for many years. With his father's death came a decline in family fortunes that was the first of a number of financial reversals he was to weather—some the predictable result of a journalist's edgy life in the unsettled West, others the consequence of both his father's and his own poor investments.

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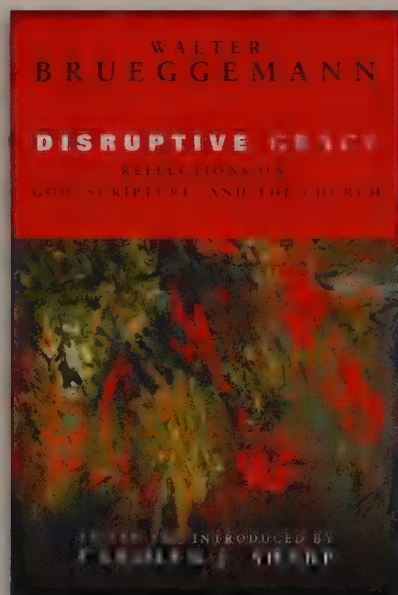
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plex subject is layered in ways that deepen our grasp of the paradoxes of his character. Capable of great tenderness, especially toward his family and a few friends—like Mary Fairbanks, whom he considered a second mother—Twain was equally capable of long grudges and savage invective when offended, mostly expressed on written pages, many of which were reserved from publication until after his death. Conflicted about race relations, he could exhibit attitudes that most today would consider bigotry, even as he gave financial assistance to black students and wrote with some passion about lynching. He defended Jews from discrimination even as he perpetuated damaging stereotypes.

Richly gifted as a humorist, Twain resisted that public identity, wanting equal recognition for the seriousness and depth of thought, wide reading and general knowledge that informed even his most lighthearted works. He strove for respectability even as he flouted decorum for the sake of laughter. His work gave great pleasure and great offense, sometimes to the same audiences. In Britain, for instance, his visits were greeted by enthusiastic crowds and wide newspaper coverage—evidence of an affection he fully returned—yet *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* mocked some of the most sacred of British traditions (even approving cartoon illustrations that caricatured Queen Victoria as a hog and the prince of Wales as a “chucklehead”) and triggered such outrage that, Loving observes, “it’s a minor miracle Twain had any English friends left at all.” A reviewer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* commented that “Mark Twain might as well have burlesqued the Sermon on the Mount.”

Raised a “fundamentalist Presbyterian,” he pursued faith questions with strange persistence, endeavoring more

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than once to realign himself with Christianity for Livy's sake, but he reserved some of his harshest judgments for Christians. Indeed, some of those harsh words now appear prophetic: in "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" he wrote, "Two or three centuries from now it will be recognized that all the competent killers are Christians; then the pagan world will go to school to the Christians—not to acquire his religion, but his guns. The

Capable of tenderness, Twain was also capable of long grudges and savage invective.

Türk and the Chinaman will buy those to kill missionaries and converts with."

Twain's ambivalences are notorious, and they are reflected on by most of his biographers, most notably perhaps by Justin Kaplan, whose *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain* makes his two-sidedness a central focus. Loving offers a nuanced presentation of Twain's character by drawing on an abundance of primary material, some of it only recently available, to enrich our understanding of the multiple pressures that came to bear upon Twain as he became a public icon. Though he retained a remarkably unpretentious candor and authenticity even in the presence of power and wealth—venturing to make jokes during an audience with King Edward VII, for example—Twain learned to guard his private life and opinions. Often in later years he relieved his frustrations by dictating unpublishable diatribes to his amanuensis and companion Paine. With the help of multiple camera angles, Loving provides in this biography a study in the astute survival strategies that enabled Twain to maintain, despite inner conflicts and public pressure, the core of humanity and humor that was his gift to the rest of us.

To Twain's contemporaries, that gift frequently took vivid and memorable form in conversations that left laughter in their wake like a blessing. For instance, with characteristic irreverence, he urged and encouraged former president Grant to complete his memoirs: "Don't look so cowed, General,' he teased him. 'You have written a book, too, & when it is published you can hold up your head & let on to be a person of consequence yourself.'" He argued in support of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* when the controversial poems were being attacked as pornography, pointing out that "such 'classic' writers as Rabelais, Boccaccio, Cervantes, Chaucer, and Shake-

speare were in every gentleman's library," and adding, "Now I think I can show, by a few extracts, that in matters of coarseness, obscenity, & power to excite salacious passions, Walt Whitman's book is refined & colorless & impotent, contrasted with that other & more widely read batch of literature."

Ever unabashed by others' fame and expertise, Twain both consulted Sigmund Freud and entertained him on a trip to Vienna with a talk titled "The First Melon I Ever Stole," and he offered unsolicited advice to William James, telling him to take a course of "medical gymnastics," as he himself had, for the health of his ailing nerves. Despite many bitter observations that humankind was a disappointment and life "a swindle," Loving concludes, Twain's "towering sense of humor and profound empathy seldom failed him for long."

That these two volumes should appear simultaneously is a happy coincidence. Americans continue to read Twain, and read about him, for good reason. No one else has contributed more to our shared sense of the comic or to the myths that have, for good or ill, shaped the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. His challenges to hypocrisy, bigotry, imperialistic presumption and abuse of power retain their relevance, his wit most of its edge, his aim its accuracy, and his best characters their capacity to mirror what we still need to see about our not-always-beautiful selves. His life story may also give us cause to realize how even the most gifted may need forgiveness—they sinned boldly by remaining faithful to their gifts.

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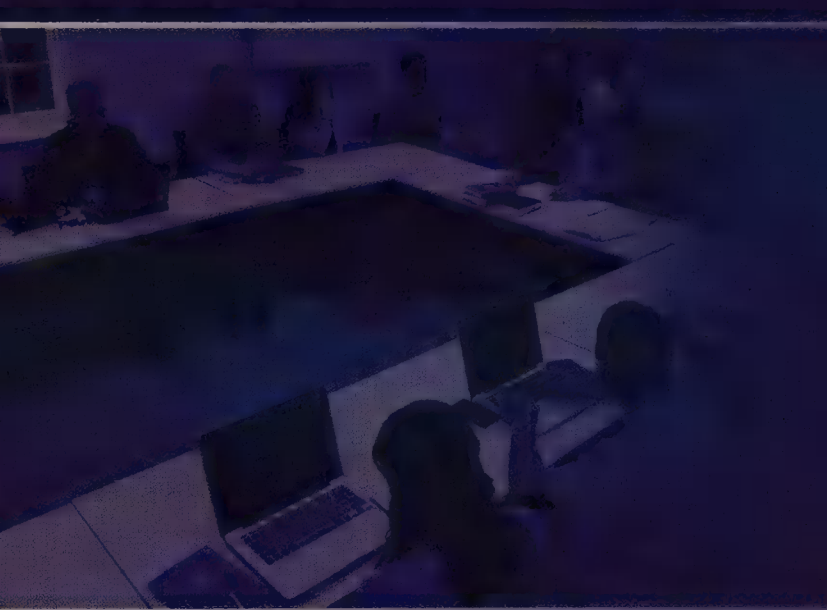


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Faith MATTERS

by Thomas G. Long

Expect a whirlwind

IN THE FILM NOIR classic *Sunset Boulevard*, Norma Desmond is an aging silent-film star with her pride fully inflated but her glory days well behind her. Early in the movie, a man driving by Norma's crumbling mansion has a flat tire, and he knocks on her door seeking help. When Norma appears, the man's eyes widen with surprise.

"You're Norma Desmond!" he says, astonished. "You used to be in silent pictures. You used to be *big*!"

Norma raises herself to her full height. "I *am* big," she says with indignation. "It's the *pictures* that got small."

Norma's retort may have something to say about current trends in congregational worship. Worship is highly contested real estate these days, what with the wild blossoming of praise songs and hand-waving chants, overamped electric bands and singer-songwriter liturgists strumming acoustic guitars, plasma screens, preachers in sweatshirts and sermons beamed to distant sanctuaries via holograms, not to mention worship spaces jammed with enough klieg lights and projectors to cause power grid brownouts. Some people love the relaxed, upbeat style that seems in ascendance, while others find it showy, commercialized and even irreverent; these are either wistful for the days of pipe organs and vestments or yearn for something new, emerging, yet unborn.

Instead of fretting about style, however, perhaps we should be more concerned about scale. Worship by definition should guide us to a larger place, should direct our gaze away from ourselves and toward the most vast, holy and mysterious of all horizons. But for all the over-the-top extravagance of many worship experiences, for all the invocations to an "awesome God," much worship today seems curiously trivial, inward and downsized. To paraphrase Norma, "The vision of worship is still magnificent; it's the services that got small."

We can see this downsizing in the sometimes trifling use of language. We Americans are involved in two bloody wars, have a rapacious petroleum habit and are near Depression levels of unemployment, but prayers of confession often bemoan banal, relatively low-cost, middle-class transgressions such as "busyness" or "letting our minds wander from You." Reportedly, Martin Luther's confessor became so frustrated when Luther was confessing "puppy sins" that he shouted at Luther, "Go kill your father or something. Then we'll have a sin to talk about!"

For another instance of the diminution of language, take the widely admired Iona hymn "The Summons." Set to a bouncy Scottish tune, it certainly has its charms, but deep in the lyrics it expects us to sing, "Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?"

Forget for a moment the tendency of recent hymns to put God's voice in the mouths of the worshipers. Focus instead on the linguistic carelessness. Try saying "the 'you' you hide" three times quickly without giggling. "Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?" sounds nice until we think about it and realize how superficial this view of the human plight is, how small-scaled and overly optimistic.

In her wonderful book *The Bones Reassemble*, Catherine Madsen finds a similar trivializing of language in some recent Jewish liturgies. One new prayer book, for example, translates Psalm 122:1 as "I was glad when people said to me, 'Let us journey to the house of THE UNSEEN.'" Madsen reports that one worshiper responded with a Bobbsey Twinsey "Yes, let's do!" and another with an adolescent "Yeah, let's see how many we can fit in the car! You bring the six-pack!"

Some downsizing in worship undoubtedly results from our culture's rampant narcissism. It is easy to sniff out the latent hubris in praise lyrics like "I can only imagine what it will be like when I walk by your side," but some "official" hymnody is hardly exempt from cloying self-reference. A much cherished hymn has the faithful croon, "Here I am Lord. It is I, Lord." Given the hymn's *Glee*-like musical setting, this usually comes across less like an awestruck Isaiah trembling before God in the temple and more like an ecclesial, "Put me in, coach! I can play centerfield!"

In the final analysis, though, neither clumsy language nor narcissism is mainly to blame for the downsizing of worship. Rather, it is the loss of the expectation of God's presence, or more precisely, God's dangerous presence. George Steiner once commented that he could imagine the author of *Hamlet* going home to lunch and responding normally to "How did it go today?" But he could not conceive of the author of the speech "out of the whirlwind" in Job "dwelling within common existence and parlance."

Just so, when even tacitly we think of the dramatis personae of worship as "just us," when there is no expectation of the whirlwind, worship becomes small and confining. True worship happens in response to the holy and dangerous mystery of God's appearing. Annie Dillard was right to name liturgy as "certain words which people have successfully addressed to God without their getting killed."

Or to put it in a more modest way, if we genuinely discerned that worship takes place in the presence of the burning bush, would we really spend the time licking the glaze off of a doughnut and sipping a latte?

Thomas G. Long teaches at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and is the author of *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Westminster John Knox).

IN Review

How should we live?

by Sam Wells

The Anglican theologian N. T. Wright once wrote a stirring introduction to the Christian faith called *Simply Christian*. Then, since he had stressed that Christianity isn't about going to heaven, he needed to say what does happen when Christians die, which he did in *Surprised by Hope*. Now he's turned to the small matter of how Christians should live; hence the appropriately but nonetheless ambiguously titled *After You Believe*.

The book has two central lines of argument. The first is that a virtue ethic is the fitting model for the Christian life—a conviction that involves a good deal of ethical exploration and considerable New Testament exegesis. The second is that Christians and the church best understand themselves as a royal priesthood, a theme which brings together the two most pressing aspects of life under God—worship and mission.

Both theses are elegantly outlined and lucidly explained. In introducing the first thesis, Wright vividly describes what he takes to be the two prevalent modes of ethical thinking among lay Christians. One is “keep the rules”—more or less deontological ethics; the other is “be authentic and do what feels right”—a hybrid of romanticism, existentialism and emotivism. This leaves out consequentialism—surely the dominant strand of ethics in the world at large, certainly in the West. Consequentialism appears later in the book at various points, but it is never introduced and never located in relation to the twofold status quo.

As to the second thesis, the synthetic power of Wright's thought and its grounding in far-reaching summaries of scriptural material is characteristically

compelling. Portraying the church as a royal priesthood is an attractive and exegetically engaging move. His account is confusing, however, in the way he suggests a weakness in the social imagination of those Christian virtue ethicists, myself included, who talk more about the church than they do about transforming the world. Yet Wright's account of the way in which Christians assume a kingly mantle (through humility and suffering, in the way Jesus did) seems very much in line with the views of those same Christian virtue ethicists. It's hard to tell where the quarrel is.

The strengths of the book are the same as those of all of Wright's work. Its synthetic quality, combining rewarding exegesis with light-touch illustration, engenders tremendous confidence that here is an author in full command of the field (whether or not that is invariably the case). The ecumenical spirit is highly engaging: Wright is well placed to set out a vision for all parts of the church (at least in the West), free from denominational assumptions. Indeed, the succinct and straightforward concluding summary of the dimensions of the Christian life—scripture, stories, examples, communities, practices—is the most satisfying and adaptable part of the book.

Wright is eager to break down the barriers between “gospel” (incarnation and ministry) Christians and “epistle” (death, resurrection and atonement) Christians. The examples are contemporary, perfectly articulated and invariably apt: the identification of Chesley Sullenberger, the pilot who calmly landed his US Airways plane on the Hudson River in 2009, as the epitome of virtue ethics reflects Wright's typically sound and

After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters

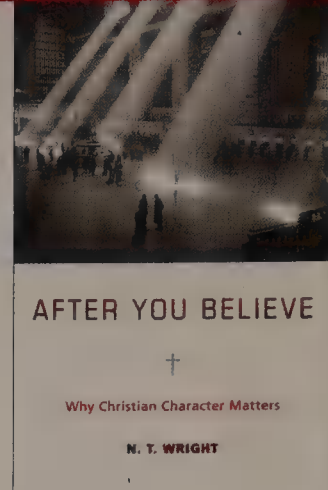
By N. T. Wright
HarperCollins, 320 pp., \$24.99

fruitful judgment. (Wright is never more persuasive than when he stops to comment, “Calling such events as the safe landing of Flight 1549 a ‘miracle’ may be a way in which our culture chooses to ignore the real challenge, the real moral message, of that remarkable sort of event.”) The explanatory style of much of the material is the sign of an experienced and energetic teacher.

The book's weaknesses are the flipside of its strengths. Most significant, it is unclear whether this is an account of discipleship directed at literate laypeople, an introduction to virtue ethics for first-year undergraduates or a polemical discussion of New Testament ethics through the lens of the virtue tradition. Equivocation between the three approaches results in lengthy chapters that begin with simple, bold statements and magisterial theological and scriptural summaries but sometimes get weighed down in argumentative detail.

Wright has an animus against those who make judgments on the basis of nonrational feelings, and the need to set such people straight sends him on a number of detours. Similarly, he is eager to alert New Testament ethicists to virtue approaches and to emphasize how much of virtue ethics may be drawn straight from the New Testament without recourse to Aristotle or re-

Sam Wells is dean of the chapel at Duke University and research professor of Christian ethics at Duke Divinity School.



liance on Thomas Aquinas—but why such advocacy belongs in a book about discipleship is not entirely clear. From time to time the energy of the expert exegete gives way to the exasperation of the weary bishop, and these are the moments in which, with a more assertive editor, less would have meant a good deal more.

No one has done more than Wright to make the broad sweep of the scriptural narrative speak to the layperson in vivid and forceful terms, while challenging the academy by pressing profound motifs as far as they can go. He is a rewarding writer and a breathless communicator. Few others could have attempted an account of Christian living that draws together scriptural, philosophical, pastoral and doctrinal perspectives in such a lucid way. He may never completely win over the academy (who does?), but he is a peerless contemporary expositor of thrilling, humble, attractive Christian faith. And we always need more of that.

Broken Hearts and New Creations: Intimations of a Great Reversal

By James Alison
Continuum, 224 pp., \$24.95 paperback

A native of England, James Alison converted to Catholicism when he was 18. He studied with the Dominicans at Oxford, received his doctorate in systematic theology from the Jesuit theology faculty in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and has lived and worked in several Latin American countries and in the United States. Most of the 16 essays in this, his seventh, book are based on presentations he gave from 2006 to 2009.

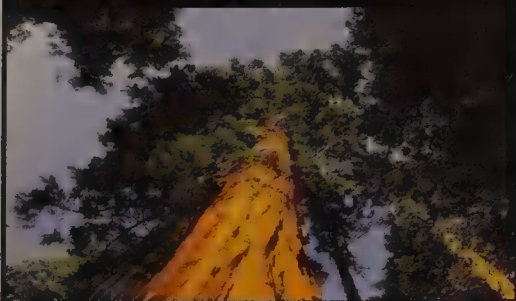
Just as Aristotle provided the philosophical foundation for the theology of Thomas Aquinas, so the contemporary French thinker René Girard provides the anthropology that is the basis for Alison's systematic theology. Developing the theological implications of Girard's

thought has been Alison's explicit project throughout his career.

Key to Girard's thought are two ideas: the social construction of the self through the imitation of others (mimetic theory) and the scapegoat mechanism—"the creation of peace out of frenzy by the random designation and expulsion of one against whom all can unite." Thus the rules for survival in the group are reciprocity (do to others as they do to you) and revenge. But in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God sides with the victim and thus replaces reciprocity with gratuity and revenge with forgiveness. Thus we are enabled "to live as if death were no more." Humans can now realize that we are fundamentally the same and that there is no need to exclude anyone.

Reviewed by J. Milburn Thompson, who is chair and professor of theology at Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky, and the author of Justice and Peace: A Christian Primer and Introducing Catholic Social Thought, both published by Orbis.

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This rather abstruse bit of amazing good news is the most prominent and consistent theme of *Broken Hearts and New Creations*, as it is the center of Alison's unorthodox orthodoxy. But other themes also weave their way through the fabric of the book.

Girard is a reader and interpreter of texts, and Alison has learned from Girard a freedom and creativity in biblical hermeneutics. He consistently sees the Hebrew scriptures and the apostolic witness "nestling in each other in quite unexpected ways." It is unusual to find a systematic theologian so well versed in biblical languages, so attentive to scripture and so creative and insightful in his interpretations—which invariably elucidate his central theme.

In an essay on discipleship, Alison explains that he writes from limbo, from two "non-places." He is quite aware that Christian faith and theology are essentially communal and ecclesial, but he is a freelance theologian and a priest with no juridical standing. This is because he has

come to believe that the current characterization of gay people by church authorities is not true, and he has been ostracized by church officials and on account of his own conscience. One does not have to be a Girardian to see the scapegoat mechanism at work here.

Alison thinks it is inevitable that the church will recognize that its position on this "third-order teaching" is untrue and untenable. In the meantime he is utterly convinced of the central truths of the Catholic faith, and he respects church authority under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He counsels the beleaguered gay Catholic community—estranged by the church for being gay and suspect to fellow gays for being Catholic—to be gentle and forgiving of church authorities as they flail about in the end game of gay acceptance.

I have two critical comments on Alison. First, because I am a moral theologian, I was looking for Alison to draw out the moral implications of living "as if death were no more." Instead his theology

remains abstract, as if the central insight into the forgiveness and freedom wrought by the Christ event is enough.

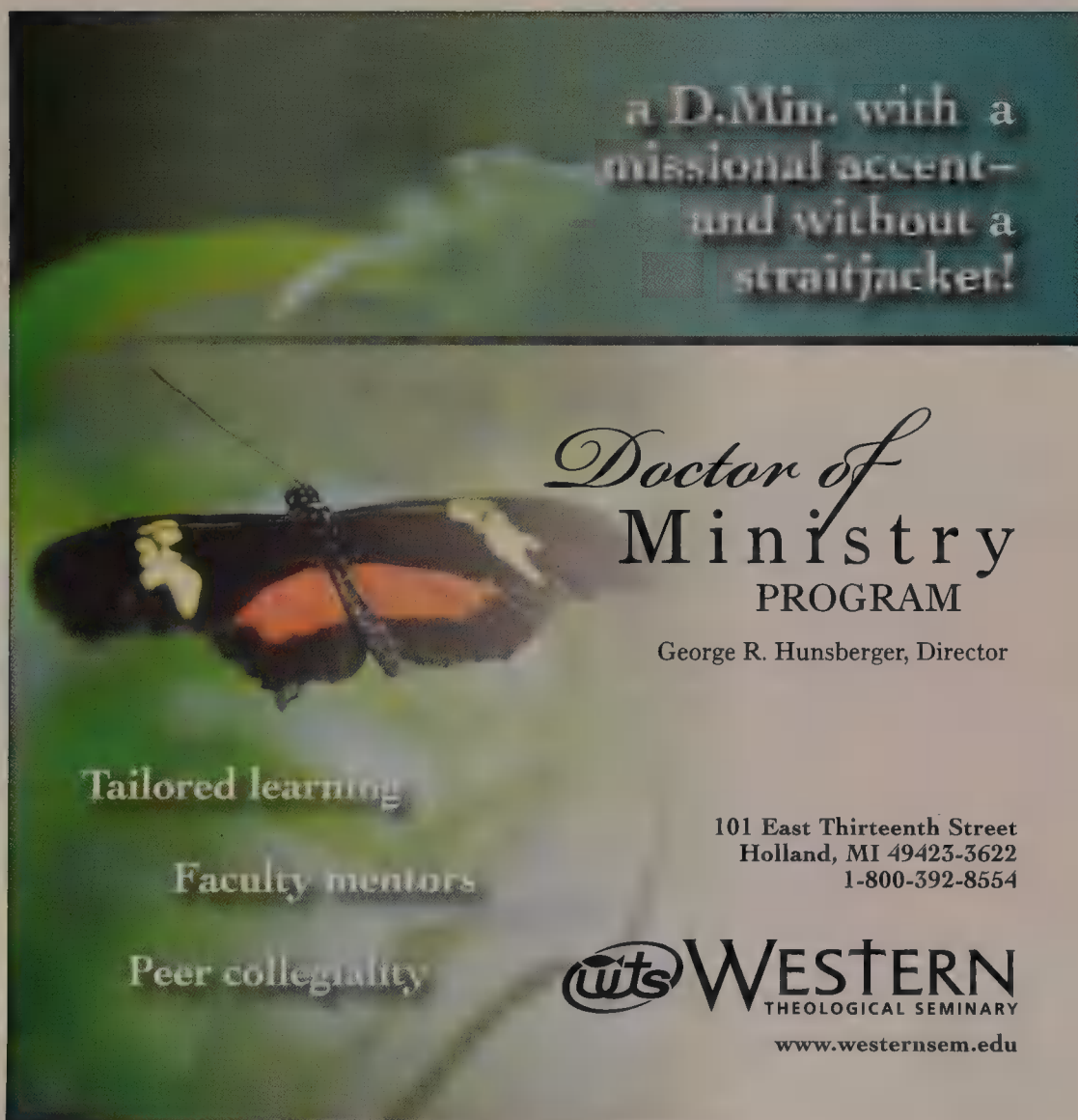
Second, I was often left confused by Alison's indirect and complex style. Reviewers of his earlier books praise his "effervescence." They find him highly readable and provocative; one says that he is "among the nimblest and most imaginative of today's theologians." I agree that Alison is a brilliant and profound theologian who is engaged in a very worthwhile project. I do not, however, find him clear and accessible. It is quite possible that his work is simply over my head.

Here is an example. In an essay on the difference Girard makes to how we read the Bible, Alison writes that "liturgy is prior to text" and that "many of the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures were born for liturgical purposes."

Once this liturgical priority is perceived, then many repetitions, slightly different versions of the same story, word play across long chunks of text and allusions within stories, all start to make sense: we are not dealing with texts which were written as "completed books" for people to buy, take home and read, as we might do with the latest Grisham or Scarpetta. What we have instead is, often enough, something much more like a mixture between preacher's manuals and orchestral scores: the former in the sense that what is being provided is a series of paths, guides and stories by which a master expositor is to make alive the event that is being celebrated, the feast that is being rehearsed; and the latter in the sense that each performance is unique, that there is real skill, accomplishment, practice and judgment required in rendering the silent annotations into the audible form that is their realisation, and that the meaning of the score is only to be sensed in the performance.

This is typical Alison—wonderful analogies wrapped in a complex sentence that one needs a GPS to get through. His style is not my cup of tea, but it may be yours.

Alison's marriage of his systematic theology to Girard's anthropology is a fruitful commitment that yields deep



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The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor: Seeing Others Through the Eyes of Jesus

By Mark Labberton
InterVarsity Press, 236 pp., \$20.00

The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice

By Mark Labberton
InterVarsity Press, 200 pp., \$18.00

Mark Labberton doesn't want you to read his new book *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor* in the traditional way. "The goal," he explains, "is not to finish this book, but to seek a transformed heart that is filled with God's joy."

This counsel is one of the many expressions of Labberton's pastoral spirit that pepper this provocative, incisive book. Most of the truths he tells are painful; most of them are also necessary if we're to grow in love. The reader will encounter hope and encouragement along the way, but only with patience.

The right way to read *Loving Your Neighbor* is in small bites, with plenty of chewing, musing, prayer and discussion between tastes. Studied correctly, it can help a congregation experience profound insight into both God's character and our practical response to God's mission in the world.

Labberton argues that radical, individual heart change is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the advancement of justice. Injustice thrives because too many of us do nothing about it. He diagnoses the reasons for our complacency: we fail to hold injustice "clearly, unmistakably, and urgently in our field of vision." There is great distance between the privileged world we inhabit and typi-

cally take for granted and that other world where tragedy, disease, destitution and oppression are rife. We misperceive suffering as *their* problem, not ours. We live "with a clear conscience, believing that we are not the perpetrators of injustice while also believing that injustice is beyond our power to change. We think this is just the way things are." But, Labberton reminds us, "the consistent witness of Scripture is that each of us is, in all times and places, implicated, deeply implicated, in the problem of injustice."

Ah. Now we see why the title has the word *dangerous* in it. If the problem is actually *our* problem, we're responsible for doing something about it. Labberton calls us to begin with the internal, and this is what sets his book apart from most other social justice literature. He calls believers to enter more deeply into the heart of Jesus. This is no simplistic call to personal piety. It is a call to respond to Jesus' invitation to join his heart. When we make our home there, we find that it's a place far more diversely populated than

we might have preferred. All sorts of unfamiliar others reside there; needy people, individuals we want to name "sinner" or "statistic" or "sad story" so we won't have to be inconvenienced by them. The heart of Jesus feels like a scary place.

But Jesus' heart is also restful and safe because it's the only place where we are truly seen and accurately named, where our deepest longings—to be known, to be accepted, to be cherished—are met. Labberton wants us to go there daily in private and corporate worship so we can begin to act as people who call the heart of God our home address.

Living in God's heart will never happen naturally; it requires deliberate effort and exercise. Here I wish that Labberton had provided more practical advice, but he does offer several helpful pointers. He counsels readers to write God a letter about the state of their hearts and about the changes needed to make their hearts more like Jesus' heart. To avoid paralysis, Labberton suggests, we should select just one issue of injustice to study and track.

Reviewed by Amy L. Sherman, a senior fellow at both the Sagamore Institute for Policy Research and the International Justice Mission.



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He also invites readers to list “those who matter in your social environment and those who matter to the kingdom of God” and then ask, “How similar and different are these lists?” Most important, he invites us to meditate on scriptural texts that remind us of God’s deep, unconditional love and powerful ability to right all the world’s wrongs. This quells unproductive guilt and reassures us that we don’t need to be the world’s savior.

Labberton also shares anecdotes about corporate exercises that nurture heart change. For example, his congregation (First Presbyterian in Berkeley, California) invited a Ugandan bishop to tell them about children vulnerable to capture by rebels in the Lord’s Resistance Army. This talk led to practical actions—but only because the speaker reframed church members’ thinking about these kids. “You won’t know what to do,” the bishop explained, “until they are first your children.”

To cultivate that mind-set, members posted photographs of the children

around the sanctuary. Corporate worship regularly involved prayer for them. Following Labberton’s example, some parishioners began subscribing to Ugandan newspapers online to stay informed and wrote letters to politicians to express their concerns. One member’s heart was pierced by the tragedy of girls captured by the LRA and sexually brutalized. She led an initiative to craft handmade quilts to send to them at a rehabilitation hospital in Goma, Uganda, that the church supports. Prior to shipping, the quilts were draped over the pews in the sanctuary, and members were invited to “wrap themselves in these expressions of God’s beauty and love” and in silence to imagine the recipients wrapped in a dignifying, loving embrace.

Activities like these on Sunday mornings will take place, though, only if preachers grasp just what’s at stake in worship and understand what worship that God accepts looks like. Helpfully, Labberton has already told pastors much of what they need to know about worship



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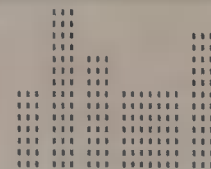
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in an earlier book, *The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call to Justice*.

There he explains, "The crisis the church currently faces is that our individual and corporate worship does not produce the fruit of justice and righteousness that God seeks." Worse, our worship often fosters "the self-indulgent tendencies of our culture rather than nurturing the self-sacrificing life of the Kingdom of God." Pastors, Labberton counsels, need to leave the worship wars over musical styles behind them and get focused on what truly matters: avoiding the divorce of worship and justice that Isaiah 1 so powerfully denounces. With intentionality and creativity, corporate worship can nurture believers in the ability to love the God of justice and to participate actively in the dangerous act of loving our neighbors.

The call to worship, Labberton writes, can remind us weekly that God is the power above all others. The prayer of confession can encourage us to admit our destructive uses of power and privilege. The Lord's Supper can remind us that King Jesus used his power to serve. Baptisms can remind us of how God mercifully renames us—and can challenge us to rename others whom we would otherwise misname or ignore. Musical elements of the service can steward our emotions in ways that help us to love mercy and do justice. Good music "can reawaken our voice, ignite our righteous anger, . . . intensify our resolve."

In addition, pastors must model personally what they want to see developed in their flock. Labberton did this by reading an update from missionary friends in Cambodia every Sunday morning. This allowed him to lead worship "with my heart freshly reminded of the realities of suffering in the world." He donates the same amount of money he spends on books for himself to purchase texts for pastors in the less developed world. He reads the prophets often and travels to see firsthand the work of various Christian ministries. As parishioners imitate such disciplines or craft others, God's transforming grace finds new on-ramps into the heart of the congregation.

Additional practical advice will be forthcoming soon as Labberton assumes his post at the new Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching at Fuller Seminary.

The institute's website will showcase examples of congregations where preaching and liturgy lead to heart transformation that provokes creative action.

Labberton's two books go a long way toward describing the sort of "walking humbly with our God" that makes it possible to do justice and love mercy. He shows us that the Micah 6:8 lifestyle is plausible—but only when the internal precedes the external. The really hard work isn't the advocacy campaign, the short-term missions trip or the canned-food drive—or even adopting AIDS orphans or making radical financial investments in aftercare for children rescued from sex trafficking. All such actions have their place. But the really dangerous labor is that spoken of by Meister Eckhart in the epigraph to Labberton's new book:

The outward work can never be great or even good if the inward work is puny or of little worth. The inward work invariably includes in itself all breadth, all expansiveness, all length,

all depth. Such a work receives and draws all its being from nowhere else except from and in the heart of God.

What Matters? Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth

By Wendell Berry

Counterpoint, 256 pp., \$14.95 paperback

When I first read Wendell Berry's 1985 essay "What Are People For?" 12 years ago, I was in college preparing to do exactly what Berry says that colleges prepare people to do—move to someplace that is not home and serve the economy. I read with academic

Reviewed by L. Roger Owens, copastor of Duke Memorial United Methodist Church, Durham, North Carolina. He is the author of The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices (Cascade).



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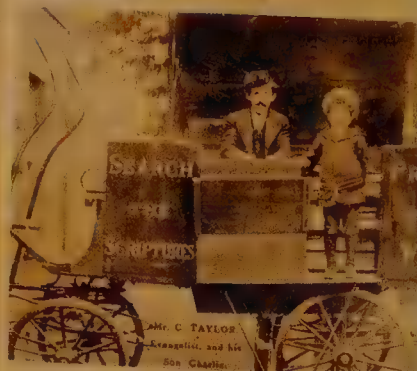
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The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College, with a grant from the Lilly Endowment, is sponsoring a two-day conference at Duke Divinity School to explore the evolving nature of American Protestant missions since the famed Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910. Through lectures and panel discussion a number of distinguished scholars will examine the American mission enterprise over the last century while discussing the extent to which America continues to play a role in the shaping of global Christianity.

Participants include:
Thomas Kidd, Mark Noll, Robert Priest, Dana Robert, and Brian Stanely

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disinterest his lament for the fate of the many "country people" who moved to cities and became unemployed.

Now I am a pastor, and after the economic collapse of 2008 many in my congregation are unemployed. So it was with renewed interest that I reread this essay, along with the 14 others (five new and nine previously published) that make up *What Matters? Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth*. However, my unemployed congregants aren't farmers who moved to the city; rather, they became victims of the economy we all serve. Writing with his usual clarity but with a less-hopeful-than-usual tone, Berry lays bare this economy's dehumanizing power.

The main theme of the new essays will not surprise anyone familiar with Berry's work. In his view, there are two economies. One we know as "the economy." The fundamental purpose of this economy is to make products as cheaply as possible and to sell them as expensively as possible. "The economy" destroys what Berry calls the *real* economy—that of the household that is situated in the economy of the local community. It does so by exploiting the local community and the rest of creation in the quest for cheap labor and raw materials. The relationship between the two economies is the book's leitmotif.

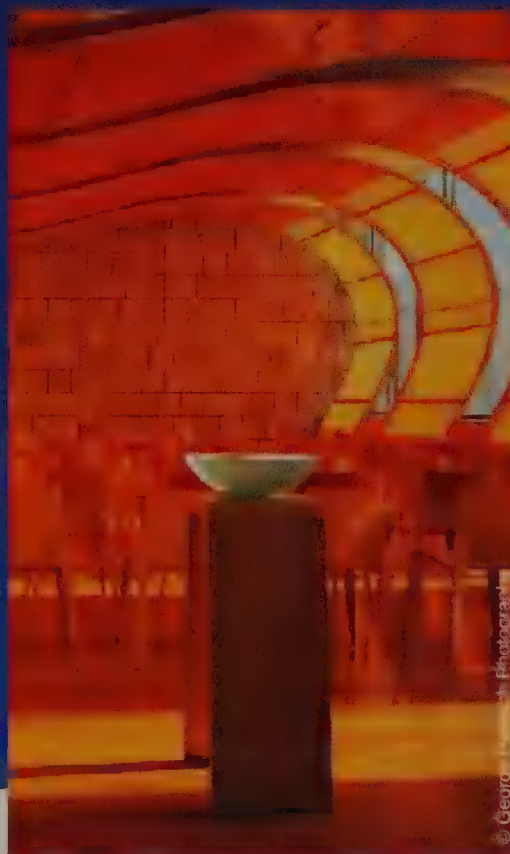
As Berry performs variations on this theme, another theme can be heard that is the real gem of the book and the most immediately compelling—Berry's anthropology. In "What Are People For?" Berry offers this answer: people are for good work. In the book's new essays Berry expands that answer and responds to the standard political solution to unemployment: to create jobs and retrain people to work in a new economy.

What the standard political solution lacks, according to Berry, is any sense of the importance of vocation and place in its understanding of what people are for. "According to the industrial standard and point of view, persons are needed

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only when they perform a service valuable to an employer." This perspective ignores the fact that people might be needed for reasons other than economic ones, or that there might be a kind of work to which a person is uniquely suited, even called. Our reductive economy can't care about such things. In "the economy" people are interchangeable parts. What does it matter to this economy that people might be needed as neighbors and friends or that a person might need a particular kind of work?

Berry is not frequently theological, but his account of what people are for in the essay "Faustian Economics" tends toward the theological. He notes that "the economy" not only dismisses the importance of place and vocation in our calling as humans, it ignores human limits. It is predicated on the possibility of limitless growth and limitless acquisition, which "requires a doctrine of general human limitlessness." And a doctrine of human limitlessness is a theological mistake.

Our self-definition as limitless animals

is a contradiction because any definition implies a limit, "which is why the God of Exodus refuses to define Himself: 'I am that I am.'" A limitless economy needs us to forget that we are creatures—and creation, a category without which Berry's work would be incomprehensible, is a theological category.

By now we are accustomed to Berry-influenced churches and Christians starting community gardens, promoting community-supported agriculture and engaging in other green initiatives. As we continue to suffer the aftereffects of the economic collapse, Berry's theological anthropology will also be important for churches to wrestle with.

These essays call us to go beyond the latest green fashions by engaging questions about human purpose—questions that churches should be uniquely qualified to ask and try to answer: Who are we? What are we for? What are our limits and how can we live creatively, even beautifully, within them?

It is possible that high unemployment

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will persist because many businesses used the slowdown as an opportunity to lay off people whom they had long wanted to replace with technology. So as the government tries to create new green jobs and train people for them, the rest of us are left to help the replaced people understand their dignity and value even without jobs. I'm thankful we have this book to help us.

Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land

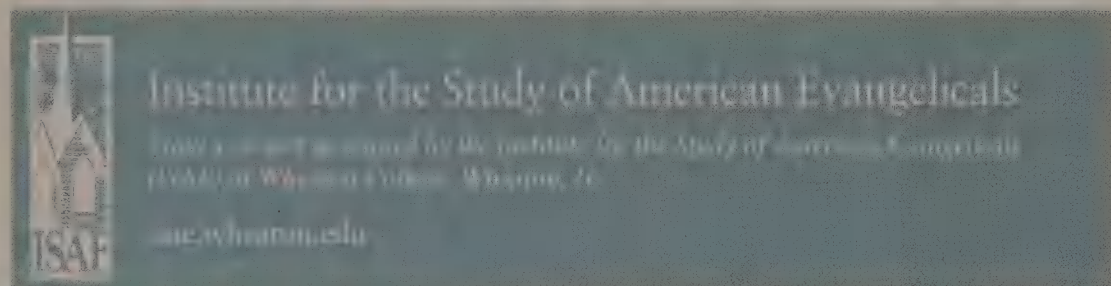
By Joseph E. Lowery

Abingdon, 144 pp., \$22.00

Joseph Lowery is a survivor of the civil rights movement, a compelling Methodist preacher and a fearless advocate for the underdog. He enjoys a celebrity status partly because of his puckish benediction at the Obama inauguration, which included the memorable phrase referring to the day "when yellow will be mellow." He has written a modest memoir that provides fresh, concrete data on the movement and his defining role in it.

This fairly random collection of sermons, essays and addresses gives access to Lowery's cadences of freedom, his willingness to dare and his refusal to give in on whatever justice issue was in front of him. The collection includes old pieces—old sermons and addresses that he seemed to give everywhere as an itinerant. It includes as well contemporary reflections on a life of faithful courage, which he recounts with justifiable pride and a liberated sense of humor. The volume is a fitting manifesto deriving from a life well lived that will aid us in remembering our public history of injustice and the courageous response to overcome it. His record makes clear that public change can be effected, but not on the cheap.

Good black preacher that he is, Lowery is an artistic phrase maker. In his retirement he is part of a group that calls



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itself Chaplains of the Common Good. They nudge the nation toward the common good in a way that is faithful to Martin Luther King's legacy of non-violence. Lowery has been just such a nudger his whole life, variously concerned with the minimum wage, capital punishment, black drivers for Coca Cola, black-owned businesses, and on and on.

Lowery recounts his role with King and Fred Shuttlesworth in the turbulent days of the movement and his leadership in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He reports on a libel suit that he, Ralph Abernathy and Fred Shuttlesworth lost after they criticized Alabama governor John Patterson in print—a suit that led to the confiscation of his car. He has harsh words for five Supreme Court justices—“three white males, one white female, and a whatchamacallhim,” his dismissive tag for Clarence Thomas. And he has a critical word for George W. Bush's secretary of state “Condaleezy,” who got her politics “so messed up.”

Lowery's is a life that has been “crazy,”

but it is a “good crazy,” the kind of good crazy that heals the world. As recently as 2007, he wrote:

The same God who was with Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego, that same God is here today. Somethin' crazy may be happening in this country. Oh, Lord! There is something in the atmosphere, and I believe we are on the cusp of something we've never seen before. Keep watching. Something crazy just may happen in this country!

In a society marked by violence, mean-spirited parsimony and greed, the large-spirited citizenship of Lowery is testimony that we can embrace. This quick read concerns grace-filled courage and clear-eyed faith. Lowery knows that we are seduced into forgetting, and he is determined that that should not happen.

Reviewed by Walter Brueggemann, whose most recent book is An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible (Fortress).

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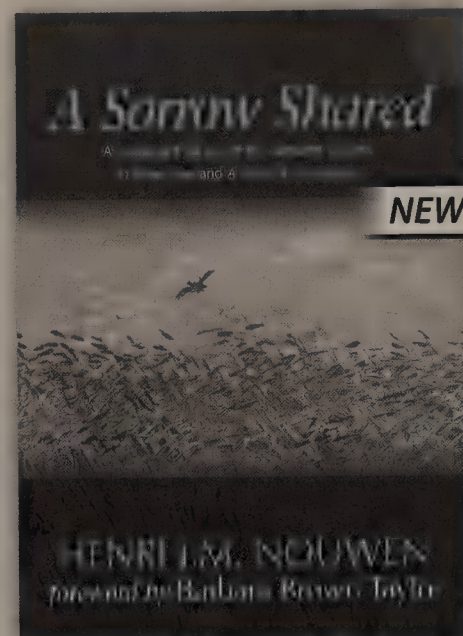
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The Fighter

Directed by David O. Russell

Starring Mark Wahlberg, Christian Bale,
Melissa Leo and Amy Adams

Boxing movies are hardly ever about boxing. Instead, they use boxing as a vehicle to explore larger issues such as raw ambition (*Champion*), fading hope (*The Set-Up*), racism (*The Great White Hope*), institutional corruption (*The Harder They Fall*), fading pride (*Requiem for a Heavyweight*), personal redemption (*Rocky*) and, in perhaps the greatest of all boxing films, *Raging Bull*, the inner workings of a damaged psyche. For decades, boxing in the movies has represented the chance for a young tough with limited opportunities to make something out of himself. This is articulated by Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, portraying an ex-boxer who tells his crooked older brother that he should have watched out for him, that “I coulda been a contender, I coulda had class.”

David O. Russell’s *The Fighter* is also about class, but in this case it’s the social kind. The film is based on the true story of “Irish” Micky Ward (Mark Wahlberg), a welterweight out of hardscrabble Lowell, Massachusetts, who fought in the 1980s and ’90s. This boxing movie’s real subject is the pull of family, Micky’s greatest obstacle to achieving “class.”

The dilemma is skillfully laid out in the first act. Micky lives in the shadow of his older brother, Dicky (Christian Bale), a once-promising fighter who has gone to seed and picked up a serious crack habit along the way. Dicky is a character straight out of Eugene O’Neill, a pipe dreamer who still talks about his glory days (he once knocked down Sugar Ray Leonard) and continues to harbor fantasies about making a comeback and



FAMILY AND CLASS: Boxer Micky Ward (Mark Wahlberg, right) begins to realize that his strongest supporters, including his former-boxer brother and trainer Dicky (Christian Bale, center), are the same people holding him back.

living up to his nickname, the “Pride of Lowell.” His delusion is fed by the rest of his whacked-out family, especially his mother, Alice (Melissa Leo), who clearly favors the goofy Dicky over the quiet and more serious Micky.

Alice is also Micky’s manager, and she has a knack for getting him fights in which he’s overmatched and takes a serious beating. As a result, Micky is rapidly turning into a “stepping stone,” a sacrificial lamb whom rising stars beat to a pulp on their way up the ladder. This is a role that Micky neither wants nor deserves. He has talent, but the question is whether he has the courage to walk away from his cloying family and make it on his own.

This is not an easy decision for Micky, since there is a part of him that still feels he needs his family—especially Dicky, who trains him and imparts his ring savvy and fighting experience (when he’s not strung out at the local crack house). The subtle suggestion is that deep down Micky feels he doesn’t deserve to move up, as if besting his brother would be an act of familial disloyalty.

Luckily, he hooks up with Charlene (Amy Adams), a bartender and college dropout who seems drawn to Micky’s

melancholy and vulnerable side. Charlene recognizes that Micky’s family—including his five big-haired sisters—are a bunch of “scumbags.” She works to build up his sense of autonomy, even as they are falling hard for each other.

There is nothing new or unique in *The Fighter*. We have seen many of its plot twists and characters before. But the combination of spicy dialogue, gritty cinematography and superior acting puts it in an elite realm. Bale, in particular, is stupendous as the damaged Dicky, doing all sorts of little things as he jumps and jukes around to let us know what is really going on inside his addled brain. Leo and Adams have somewhat stereotypic roles but milk every drop of life out of them.

They shine in part because Wahlberg’s performance is so generous and low-key. He plays the straight man to his showy costars, showing genuine emotion only when he is in the ring, looking every bit the fighter he is portraying. *The Fighter* is one of those always-welcome ensemble pieces that is, thanks to the vision of a talented director, even better than it should be.

Reviewed by John Petrakis, who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.

by Philip Jenkins

notes from the GLOBAL CHURCH

Somewhere along the way, European cinema lost its religion. As recently as 1995, the Vatican published a well-informed list of 45 “great films,” with a predictable emphasis on religious and spiritual themes, and European contributions were much in evidence. The catalogue was impressive in its breadth: it included an Eastern Orthodox classic like Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Andrei Rublev* (1969), about the legendary icon painter, as well as Pier Paolo Pasolini’s ruggedly Marxist *Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1966). The compilers were by no means looking for syrupy piety. Remarkably, they mentioned a significant number of then-recent entries of the highest quality, including Gabriel

created brilliant studies of Christian sanctity, and sometimes presented the churches and their clergy in heroic roles (like the indomitable Resistance priest in Roberto Rossellini’s 1945 film *Open City*). While these films might have been critical of orthodoxies or hierarchies, they presented Christianity as something demanding respect and inquiry. Faith mattered. But what would a culturally literate person take from European films made in the past decade or so?

One major problem is the lack of films that address mainstream or institutional religion as opposed to general “spirituality.” Looking only at films with a particular ecclesi-

who seduced and betrayed a young woman. A pederastic priest is the antihero of the Italian film *Sacred Silence*. The 2002 Irish film *The Magdalene Sisters* exposed the maltreatment of troubled young girls by church-run industrial schools, under the auspices of savage and perverted nuns. When you meet a cleric in a modern European film, expect depravity.

The apparent evils of Christianity are not confined to explicit sexual abuse. Churches also conspire to rape the mind. The Danish production *Worlds Apart* (2008) describes a teenage girl brought up in the Jehovah’s Witnesses faith but

the two adjectives are close to synonymous.

If modern Europe has produced major Christian films, their settings are so exceptional that they can have little relevance to ordinary religious practice. One personal favorite of mine is the 2006 Russian film *The Island*, a biography of a fictional Orthodox monk, a charismatic saint of immense spiritual power. Despite its modern setting—the plot revolves around an unresolved wrong committed during the Second World War—the film is rooted in age-old traditions of Christian piety. If films had been made during the great age of the Orthodox saints and holy fools, they would have looked like this.

Equally neomedieval was *Into Great Silence*, a visually stunning 2005 documentary about the lives of French Carthusian monks. The recent *Vision* explored the life of Hildegard of Bingen. Like *The Island*, these films were critically acclaimed, but what does that reception say about contemporary attitudes to faith? Religion, it seems, may be a vital and transforming force, but it is the preserve of highly trained mystics dedicated to life apart. Religion is a matter for trained professionals. Ordinary people are firmly being told: don’t try this at home.

Recent European films portray the church as a model of organized hypocrisy.

Axel’s *Babette’s Feast* and Krzysztof Kieslowski’s series *The Decalogue*. Not long ago, it seemed, European religious cinema—broadly defined—was thriving.

If the Vatican ever tore itself away from its present troubles long enough to compose a similar list, I wonder if its clerics could find a comparable range of offerings. The question resonates far beyond the world of film trivia. Some 50 or 60 years ago, the great filmmakers treated religious themes seriously and placed those themes firmly on the cultural landscape. These auteurs

astical setting, one finds a simple and almost uniform message: the church is a model of organized hypocrisy, dedicated to the repression of individual freedom, above all in sexual matters.

Moviegoers would have little trouble organizing an Anticlerical Film Festival, with entries from some of Europe’s greatest filmmakers. In *Bad Education* (2004), Spain’s Pedro Almodóvar dealt with the sexual abuse of boys in a Catholic school. The Spanish-Mexican coproduction *The Crime of Father Amaro* (2002) revealed a hypocritical priest

ostracized when she tries to live the life of an ordinary young European. As a study of life in a strict religious sect, the film is excellent, but it stands out as one of the very few treatments of everyday Christian life of any kind in contemporary Europe. In Europe, far more than in the U.S., religion appears in cinema as a problem, and the solution to that problem is usually liberated sexuality. Consider the 2000 film *Chocolat*: it was set in a grossly repressed Christian village, and

Philip Jenkins teaches at Penn State University.

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ASSOCIATE PASTOR—First Presbyterian Church, Naples, FL, is seeking an energetic associate for 1,000-plus congregation. The ideal candidate will be broadly engaged in the ministries of First Presbyterian and must possess strong skills and experience in the area of pastoral care. This person will offer support and vision for the church's mission and share in the education and spiritual formation of the congregation. Interested candidates should contact Bill Barton, co-chair, by e-mail at: billbarton39@comcast.net. The CIF number is 01368.AFO.

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY FOR SCHOOLS/ COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES DIVISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION—The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church invites applications and nominations for the position of Assistant General Secretary for Schools, Colleges and Universities. The incumbent facilitates the denomination's support of and partnership with its related educational institutions, annual conferences, global partners and ecumenical groups and works with the colleges to address emerging and critical needs. Prospective candidates should have proven success as a key contributor and effective leader. Graduate level degree (doctorate [Ph.D., D.Min. or Ed.D.] with research component) required; M.Div. and ordination a plus; demonstrated successful significant senior-level administrative experience at a regionally accredited private college or university, preferably United Methodist-related, required; knowledge of history and current characteristics of United Methodist-related higher education and understanding of the structure of the United Methodist Church; broad technical knowledge and skills in church-related higher education administration; strong analytical skills and ability to think strategically (visionary). Candidates must be willing and able to travel extensively. Relocation to Nashville, TN, required. Visit: www.umc.org and click on Jobs for full position description details. Apply to: hr@gbhem.org or via fax at: (615) 340-7048. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer.

Falls Church Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), Falls Church, VA, seeks a full-time PASTOR/HEAD OF STAFF to lead our 500-member suburban Washington, D.C., congregation. Our CIF number is 00399.AGO. Send your PIF, résumé or inquiry to: www.fcpc.pnc@gmail.com or Kirk Salpini, 4221 Holborn Ave., Annandale, VA 22003.

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Dr. Thomas G. Long is the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, GA. He is the author of many books including, *The Witness of Preaching and Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral*.



Thomas Lynch is a writer and funeral director from Milford, Michigan. He has taught with the Graduate Program in Creative Writing at University of Michigan. His books include *The Undertaking*, which became an Emmy Award-winning PBS documentary by the same name.

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Recollection ... yellow (I), by Elisa D'Arrigo

The dynamic of Elisa D'Arrigo's work seems simple: yellow squares sewn together, with the thread bringing out a sculptural dimension. But a specific memory underlies each piece. Writes D'Arrigo: "These memories are of images I once observed, and then held in mind . . . sometimes for decades, and are the subtext of the work." Sometimes the memory is directly related to a piece of fabric of her past, or the past of friends in her community. A narrative is developed through abstraction. There's something appropriate about meeting D'Arrigo's sculpture during Ordinary Time, for this is a season for building a calendar of squares. In these weeks we understand that formation comes as small threads pull and bind and connect and shape us. This in turn causes planes to pop out or angle in, looking as though they were in a constant dynamic of subtle changes of light. In a season that is about formation and process, D'Arrigo's work extends the spiritual plane through the physical.

—Lil Copan

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